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ORLETON MANOR.

THE MYSTERY

OF

ORLETON MANOR.

BY

ROBERT JEWELL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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ORLETON MANOR.

CHAPTER I.

When Tom arrived in Liverpool, Sam was at the railway station waiting to receive him. He was got up, as he himself observed, quite regardless of expense, and in the height of fashion. Not after the manner in which he had delighted to show himself some few months before, for then Sam was but a seedy buck after all, but in good taste.

"I dare say you are surprised, old feller, to see me look so well," he said, while they were standing on the platform. "I do look well. I can't deny it. You can't deny it. Nobody can deny it. The fact is, having plenty of money now, for I'm getting thirty pound a month, I put myself unreservedly in the hands of the first tailor in town. I think I do him credit. But to come to the point at once, Tom, I'm glad you are come. I was sure you would, and I've met every train by which you could arrive since yesterday morning, except when professionally engaged. And when I couldn't come myself, I sent

a man to look out for you. He wouldn't have missed you, for I fastened your photograph in the crown of his hat, and as he is always mopping his head, he was sure to have it continually before his eyes. Here he comes. Here, Ebby, you lazy old beggar," he continued, "take this gentleman's portmanteau, and carry it to my lodgings, and don't stop on your way to look into the cook-shop windows."

He was a large-made, elderly man, and extremely fat and unwieldy. His thin hair, which was always damp with the perspiration of his brow, as he informed them, hung in lank wisps to his largely developed back head, a few hairs being brought over each ear and pasted flat to his heavy, sallow, grease-exuding cheeks. He lifted Tom's small amount of luggage, and placed it on his broad shoulder, with an effort which was worthy of a couple of hundredweights at least.

"You are thinking he isn't a beauty, aren't you?" Sam said, seeing his companion watching the fellow. "Well, I must say he isn't. You're not a beauty, are you, Ebby?"

"I may not be now, sir, for I've had my trials," he replied, unctuously. "But there was a time, sir, when perhaps it was otherwise."

"He's a great humbug, Tom," Sam informed his friend, aside. "But he's very useful. He runs errands for us at the theatre. His wife is employed there in selling the tickets. You wouldn't think it, perhaps, but he is a perfect gourmand. I say, Ebby," that facetious young gentleman continued, "if you make haste, I'll give you your supper. Not

bread and cheese, but a regular blow-out, you know. You would do anything for a good feed, wouldn't you, Ebby?"

"Most things, sir," Ebby replied, meekly. "But times are bad, and I'm growing thin. I'll remember what you say, sir, about supper; and the gentleman shall find his luggage at your apartments, sir, directly you arrive there."

"What is that fellow's other name, Sam?" Tom inquired, as they walked out of the station.

"Fuller!" Sam replied. "Ebenezer Fuller. I generally remark, Tom, that scriptural names go with rogues. If I hear of a woman being called Patience, I can't help pitying her husband; or Charity, and I pity her friends and neighbours, and so on all the way through. Ebby is no exception. He's such an oily dog, and, as he says, he would do most things for a good feed."

"I thought I remembered him," Tom said. "Do you know, Sam, that fellow in his time has thrashed me until I could not sit down after it? He was the schoolmaster at the workhouse."

"Was he?" Sam exclaimed, making a sudden stop. "By Heaven! then you shall take your change out of him to-night. I'll thrash him when we get home, or perhaps you would like to do it yourself. Now I come to think, perhaps you had better; I should probably kill him. Or would you like him garrotted? I can get it done for you for a gallon of beer. Liverpool is a delightful place if you owe a fellow a grudge. I'll back it against Sheffield any day. There they'll murder you, or blow you and your family up on principle, and as

men of principle those gentle grinders are to be admired. But here! well, you know, it's a money-making place, and I daresay I could find a dozen gentlemen, of no profession in particular, who are willing to earn an honest penny by knocking you or anyone else on the head. Charming, isn't it?"

"Very!" Tom answered, laconically.

"I thought you would say so. But look here in this shop-window. Do you see me there? Yes, that's my portrait, and I'm Mr. Seymour Beaufort. Since I've made my appearance before the public, I've gone in for the second baptism. Good name, isn't it? I thought you would like it. It suits my appearance too. Quite aristocratic. Much better on the play-bills than Mr. Maggs; the public wouldn't stand that at any price. The poet was wrong when he said 'a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.' Put a rose on the stage and call it a dandelion, and I'll bet you any money the public would say its odour was anything but pleasant," Sam said. "But to resume. This is the very deuce of a place, Tom. Some parts, 'pon the honour of a Beaufort, are astonishing. They swarm with ladies and gentlemen of no profession, or of such professions as are not whispered until after dark. If you ask 'em—and I've had the curiosity to engage a few of them in conversation through the medium of my friend Ebby, for it's a part of my profession to study all shades of character—if you ask them why they don't give up their evil ways, they all make one answer: that a poor feller or a poor girl *must* live. And, by Jove! there's a good deal in that answer too. If they tried ever so hard

to obtain honest employment, not one man in fifty of them would succeed, and not one woman in five hundred. You can't reform 'em; you can't provide for 'em; and they must live. My idea is, it would be a blessing if we could scuttle the ship and begin again. You see, old feller, I'm becoming quite nautical. It's the deuce of a place to make a feller become like a gallant British sailor. I'm thinking of leaving off my braces, so that I may hitch my trousers up in the true nautical style. I would, too, only I'm afraid of a catastrophe in a moment of forgetfulness."

"You forget, Sam, the purpose of my coming here," Tom remarked. "What is this about Marion?"

"Ah!" Sam replied with a deep sigh. "I don't forget it. I forget nothing about her; I wish I could. I've never spoken to her on a certain subject, since I promised you I wouldn't. I've watched her though. I've kept my eye on her, and I've kept my eye on others who were watching her. She's come out strong, old feller. There's been no such woman on the stage since Mrs. Siddons's time. Everybody says so. She's grand as Lady Macbeth. She's made my hair stand on end when she says 'Give me the daggers!' And then she's so handsome. I wish I didn't love her, but it's no use wishing. I'm not the only one either that's in love with her. This eagle eye"—he did not say which —"this eagle eye has seen fellers make up to her. This eye saw one feller try to chuck her under the chin—he had a big lump on the back of his head a few minutes after, and one of the stage properties

wanted repairs at the same time—but, above all, this eagle eye spotted one in particular, a saintly-looking rogue, Tom, and that rogue's blood I'll have. It may be through his nose. But no matter, I'll have it. He's sent her letters—Ebby has carried 'em. He's always poking letters in the young ladies' hands at the theatre, is Ebby—a sort of a fat, greasy Mercury, you know. I'll have his blood, too, if he doesn't mind what he's up to. He's made several proposals to her—not Ebby, but the saint—proposals, too, that I believe have varied somewhat in their conditions. But she wouldn't tell me. She'll have nothing to say to him. He now wants to marry her. At least he says so; she has told me that much. But I've found out a great deal more. They say that love makes us blind; don't believe it, Tom. It's a dashed lie. *I* never was so sharp-sighted in my life before. And I've found out that she's watched—she's dogged—she's—but here we are. Walk up, old feller, and if you'd like to throttle Ebby, say the word! I'll not stand in your way."

"We must talk all this over when he is gone," Tom said. "But with respect to Mr. Fuller. I should like to have a few words with him, if you don't mind."

"Not a bit. We'll have supper now, and you can talk to him as much as you like, while he picks up what we leave," Sam replied.

So they sat down at the table, and Sam told Tom of his fears, his anxieties, his hopes, and his love, which, nevertheless, did not interfere with his appetite.

"You don't mind my smoking, I suppose?" Tom

said, when they had drawn their chairs to the fire, for the evenings had begun to get chilly. "I always like a pipe at this time of night."

"Not at all. I'm fond of smoking myself," Sam replied. "That is, an empty pipe. Tobacco disagrees with me."

"Then suppose we have that fellow up," Tom observed.

"Certainly," said Sam. "We'll have him up at once." Then going to the door, he called out to Mr. Fuller, who was seated in the passage below with his hat between his knees, "Ebby, you sly old sinner, you can come up."

"Now, then," Sam continued, when the unctuous Ebenezer made his appearance in the room, "look here, Ebby! eat as much as you like, but don't pocket any. That's beef-steak pie, that is."

"I'm fond of pie, sir," Ebenezer replied, stroking his lank hair.

"I know you are," said Sam. "And them's tarts."

"Tarts is a weakness of mine, sir. I suffer for 'em," Ebenezer remarked.

"More like you suffer *from* 'em," Sam observed. "I wouldn't eat too many if I were you. They're green gooseberry tarts, and may be too much for you."

"They're all right with plenty of sugar, sir," Ebenezer answered. "Such sugar as you have, too, sir. White sugar! They're delicious with white sugar."

"Well, mind what you're about, that's all. Every one of them you eat over six has got jalap in

'em," said Sam; "and there's the cheese, so fire away."

"Sir, I will," Ebenezer replied, with a smile. "I like to fire away. I was brought up on pies, and gooseberry tarts, and white sugar, sir. For a number of years I lived on 'em. But times are altered." And he turned back the cuffs of his coat and prepared to fall to. Before commencing operations, however, his eye roamed over the table as though in search of something. He then replaced his knife, and putting his right hand before his mouth, he coughed gently, and said in an insinuating tone, "Perhaps you don't happen to have any porter, sir?"

"Well! I have a small bottle," Sam replied. "I didn't mean to let you have it though, but if you'll promise to answer this gentleman any question he may ask you, you shall have it."

"Thank you, sir! I'm fond of porter," Ebenezer replied. "And I'm sure under *such* circumstances I couldn't refuse answering anything the gentleman, and a friend of *yours*, sir, may ask me. May I have the honour of drinking your health, sir? Thank you, I will. And the other gentleman's, sir? I will drink his too." And he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Mr. Fuller," said Tom, after Ebenezer had made considerable havoc of the pie, "I think I've seen you before under different circumstances. Were you not the schoolmaster at a certain workhouse?"

Ebenezer laid down his knife and fork and looked at Tom out of the corners of his little eyes. "Sir,"

he replied, "I will not deceive you; I was. Those days were happy days, sir. But I do not remember your face. Perhaps you were a visiting magistrate; but you would have been too young at that time. Perhaps, though, your pa was, and you may have accompanied him on one of his visits."

"Perhaps so," Tom said. "But how is it you left such a comfortable situation?"

"Indeed, sir, it is a sorrowful tale," Ebenezer replied, with his mouth full of tart. "Sorrowful, inasmuch as it shows how unstaple is human happiness—how fickle is woman. Perhaps, sir, you knew the governor!"

Tom nodded.

"And the governor's wife?" inquired Ebenezer.

"I did," Tom replied, "and Miss Spring."

"Then, sir, you knew a viper," Ebenezer said, shaking his head solemnly, and dropping some crumbs from his mouth on to the table cloth. "She was ungrateful, sir; she was old, she was ugly; but above all, she was jealous. That woman—that viper—sir, ruined me, and made me the wreck I am. Might I ask for a little more porter, sir? I suffer very much from thirst when talking."

Sam hesitated a moment. He did not care to see his drinkables go in this way, but he thought if he refused Mr. Fuller might become silent. So he handed him a second bottle with the remark that "he had better give over being thirsty; it was an expensive habit."

"Thank you, sir," Ebenezer said. "We can't help being thirsty, sir. I used to suffer dreadfully from thirst. I like being thirsty. We can't help

our appetites, sir. Some can't govern 'em—especially women. I can't say I like women, they are always making mischief. They are at the bottom of every misfortune, sir. If I see a man sent to prison—I hate prisons—I always feel sure a woman is at the bottom of it. If one is unfortunate enough to get hanged, you may swear it's all through a woman. If a man loses a comfortable place where the victuals are good, the drink plenty, and the work light, it's all a woman's doings. I lost such a place; there was pies, and tarts, buttered toast, and beer. The duties weren't worth talking about, the wages liberal, and I had a boy to black my boots, wash up the tea-things, and fetch and carry, more particularly to fetch. If he was saucy, I walloped him; if the toast was burnt, his head ached for it; if my slippers weren't well aired, he preferred to stand rather than sit for a considerable time after. Them was beautiful times, sir; but alas, they departed about ten year ago."

"And was a woman the cause of your misfortunes?" Tom inquired.

"Yes, sir," Mr. Fuller replied. "They are at the bottom of everything bad. They caused the fall of Adam, and they caused the fall of Ebenezer, only in my case there were two of 'em. What chance had I against two, sir? One is enough to ruin any ordinary man. Some of 'em manage even to do for dozens. I was innocent; I was young; but greatest misfortune of all, I was considered good-looking."

"Might I ask in what manner they caused your misfortunes?" Tom asked.

"Certainly, sir! I will tell you," Ebenezer re-

plied. "But first, if I may, I will try another tart."

"You've had six already, Ebby," Sam remarked. "All the rest are hocussed."

"You are facetious, sir. You are fond of your joke, sir," Mr. Fuller replied, with a cunning leer. "Sir, I will risk the jalap—white sugar will correct it. But, sir," he continued, unbuttoning his vest and loosening the two top buttons of his waistband, "I was about to give the gentleman my experience. I may be prolix, or perhaps I may be eloquent. Who would not be under such circumstances?" and he waved his hand expressively over the table. "Under these circumstances, gentlemen, I could go on all night, or if not all night—for if the spirit is willing the flesh is weak—at least as long as the victuals last. When the stomach is full the heart is open, and porter, gentlemen, loosens the tongue. The nearest and most direct way to the heart is through the mouth. That, gentlemen, is sound philosophy."

"But you are wandering from your subject," Tom remarked. "Try to hark back, man. How was it the ladies you refer to caused your misfortunes? I feel interested in your narrative."

"Sir, I will tell you," Ebenezer answered. "I was the victim—yes, sir, victim is the word—of woman's two most powerful passions—love and jealousy. They both were fond of me, they both were jealous of me. For a considerable time, sir, I felt it pleasant. Their attentions were kind and delicate. If one sent me a pie, the other would be sure to beg my acceptance of a necktie. If my

servant fetched a bottle of rum from this one he was sure to bring back some little offering from the other. They may have been unaware of each other's passion, but it appeared to me uncommonly like competition. Sir, if you knew Mrs. Cuddle, you knew one of the ladies I refer to. If you knew Miss Spring, you knew the other. Mrs. Cuddle was warm in her feelings, and comparatively young in years, while age had cooled the governor. Mrs. Cuddle was full of love and ardour—the governor was full of nothing but rheumatics. You knew Miss Spring, sir! She was no longer young, sir, but years had not put out the fire in her heart, nor cooled her desire to enter into the matrimonial state. That desire, instead of being lessened by time, went on increasing. The older she got the more eager she was, until she would not be denied. You may remember her nose, sir. It was red—it was pinched. It was indicative of an acid temper. Her breath, sir, was—well, what it oughtn't to be. In fact, she endeavoured to disguise it with peppermints. I don't like the smell of peppermints. She made me promise her marriage; but who could promise to love and cherish a female with a red nose, and whose— But, sir, I weary you."

"Not at all, Mr. Fuller. I'm deeply interested," Tom replied.

"Then I will continue," Ebenezer said. "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune. Mr. Beaufort, I've heard you say those words at the theatre, and uncommonly well you spoke them. Well, sir, at last I thought the tide in my affairs was at the flood, and I

launched my humble bark. The governor broke a blood-vessel, sir. He was always a passionate man. I saw him do it. Mrs. Cuddle saw him do it, and fell into my arms. Miss Spring declared she was there before the governor broke his blood-vessel, but that was scandal, sir. But he died, sir; the governor died, and in consequence was buried. You know, sir, that the governor must always be a married man, without any other incumbrance than a wife, who takes the duties of matron. No sooner, then, had the governor departed from his comfortable post than Miss Spring comes to me and says, 'Ebby, dear'—she always called me Ebby—'the governor's place is vacant, and, as a natural consequence, the matron's too. It will suit you and me very well. And Ebby,' says she, 'two young hearts can now be joined in one, bound together in the bonds of holy matrimony, and eighty pounds a year and all found. We can be married,' says she. 'So we can,' says I. 'And we've no incumbrance as yet,' says she. 'And not likely to,' thinks I. 'Then see the guardians at once,' says she. 'I'll think about it,' says I. Well, gentlemen, I did think about it. The governor's place is a beautiful post—sole command of the provisions, the wines for hospital—of everything. But then Miss Spring had her failings. I've mentioned them before. So I walked across to talk the matter over with the matron. She had a natural objection to leave, but none to my reigning in Mr. Cuddle's place. I began to think that Miss Spring's proposal was impracticable. Mrs. Cuddle informed me her husband's life was insured for three hundred pounds. There was no question about it then. We

had lots of time before us. The election would not take place for six weeks. We buried the governor, and I went as one of the mourners. Believe me, gentlemen, I've mourned him sincerely since then. I've wished him alive more than once. But he was dead, and I married his widow a month after. People said it was indecent; but we didn't mind them if the guardians thought differently. I told them it was all zeal in their service. But the jealousy of that Miss Spring was dreadful. She actually married the porter of the house, and opposed me at the election. I'm afraid public opinion was against us. The porter won, and we had to start. We set up a cook-shop on the three hundred pounds and what the governor had saved, but it didn't pay. All the profits went in housekeeping. And now, gentlemen, through the jealousy of a woman I am what I am. And Mrs. Fuller, sir, is altered. She's grown fat, and is not quite as particular in her person as she used to be. She sells tickets at the theatre, sir, and arranges little meetings at our house between victims of love of the opposite sexes. If you should be calling by our way, sir, she would be happy to introduce you to youth and beauty."

Tom blushed to the roots of his hair, and his nostrils opened out like those of a young war-horse. "You scoundrel, how dare you?" he said, fiercely, rising from his chair, and turning to the terrified Ebenezer. "Open the window, Sam! I'll throw him through."

He had been losing his temper for some time, and as he sat watching the leering eyes of Mr. Fuller, while he was relating the history of his misfortunes,

he was vowing to himself that to put his hand on the hypocritical rascal's throat, and shake him out of his shoes, would afford him unspeakable pleasure. But when the fellow made his infamous proposal to Tom, the odds were ninety-nine to one that he left the room immediately, but not through the door.

"Sit down, old feller," said Sam, in a whisper, placing his hand on Tom's arm. "He's an awful blackguard, but he may be able to tell us what we would give anything to find out." Then turning to Mr. Fuller, whose sallow complexion fear had turned to a dull leaden hue, he continued, "Ebby, I knew you were a rogue, but I didn't think you were such a fool as not to know a gentleman when you saw one."

"I knew he was a gentleman," Ebenezer whined; "anybody could see that."

"Then why the deuce did you make your blackguard offer?" said Sam. "You mustn't think that every man you happen to be allowed to speak to without being kicked is a worn-out, dissipated young scamp. Mind what you're up to, Ebby, or, by Jove, I'll thrash you myself." And Sam bent his arm and felt his muscle.

"I humbly ask the gentleman's pardon," Mr. Fuller replied. "I'm moral myself. I always was moral. But Liverpool, sir, is an awful place. The most pure can't help being contaminated. I was pure, sir, when I come here. But I know I've sunk. There are such temptations, sir. The young gentlemen themselves are so tempting, and the money is so easily got. And then, sir, a poor man *must* live."

"There!" said Sam. "He must live, Tom. Every rogue says he must live. Didn't I tell you so?"

"I don't see any necessity why he should," Tom replied grimly, as he glowered on the moral Ebenezer.

"But, sir, you've never tasted poverty, nor known how bitter it is," Mr. Fuller said, though Tom thought differently. "When you get up in the morning, you know your pies, and your tarts, and your sherry wine will be ready for you at the proper time. Hunger, sir, and such hunger as *mine*, is a hard master. No man was moraler or more religiously inclined than I was when I come here. I have held forth myself, sir. But you see what poverty's brought me to. Oh, sir, if I had but a comfortable place in a rich man's kitchen, where there was little to do, and the eating and drinking was undeniable, I would be *so* moral. I would come out from among the ungodly, sir, and leave Mrs. Fuller to her abominable devices. You damned me just now, sir! Oh, you did, and perhaps I deserve it. But I hope I shall escape it yet, sir. It's an awful thing to be damned by a gentleman as is a fellow-creature, especially when you are inclined to be moral and escape the burning, and the gnawing tooth of remorse that never dies. You may damn Mrs. Fuller, sir—*she* deserves it. I won't say a word if you curse *her* for an hour. But spare me, sir. Spare unfortunate Ebenezer. I don't mind being cursed by a poor man, sir. It's their way of expressing themselves, and they mean nothing by it. But a gentleman's damn is different, sir. Oh, it's so very different. He knows what it is.

He knows that, as the immortal Milton said—and I read Milton, sir, especially his 'Paradise Regained,' for it points to hope, sir, hope for poor unfortunate Ebenezer — as Milton said, sir, it is to be sent 'with burning and combustion down to bottomless perdition.' And then, sir, you damn so hearty!"

Tom's heavy boot was drumming impatiently on the carpet. Sam noticed it, and feared another outbreak. "Drop your morality, you old humbug," he said to Mr. Fuller. "An old rogue is bad enough any day, but a hypocritical old rogue is much worse. How many letters have you taken to the ladies at the theatre to-day?"

"I've taken a few," he meekly replied, as he played with his glass.

"Well, how many? come now!" said Sam.

"I can't recollect, sir. I'm trembling all over, sir. The gentleman frightened me, and I'm troubled with heart complaint," Ebenezer replied, placing his hand over his heart.

"That's nonsense, you know," said Sam. "It's your liver that's wrong and not your heart. Why man, you have no heart. You're all stomach."

"Oh, but I have, sir; it's palpitating fearfully," Ebenezer gasped. "Don't be uneasy, sir," he added after a moment's pause, addressing Tom.

"I am quite easy," Tom replied coolly.

"I'm glad to hear you say so, sir," Ebenezer whined; "very glad indeed, sir. It wouldn't matter to a gentleman like you what a poor man like me suffered. But you haven't got a drop of brandy here, sir, have you? Oh! there it is again." And his

hand was again placed over his heart, and kept there until Sam poured him out a glass of brandy.

"Thank you, sir; I'm better now, sir. Another glass, if you please, sir; for it might return, and you were asking me about some letters, sir, weren't you?" Mr. Fuller said.

"Well, I suppose I must," Sam said. "I wish 'twas blood. I would pour out gallons of my blood for a certain person. Perhaps I shall pour out somebody else's blood directly. But no matter. Go on. Who were they to?"

"There was sixteen to Miss de Lancy, and nine to Madame de Montfort, both ladies of the ballet," Ebenezer replied. "Miss de Lancy is the favourite, and drives her carriage."

"She gets a pound a week, Tom," Sam remarked.

"But her gentleman is rich, sir. Mr. Yarn is very wealthy, and it's his money as pays for Miss de Lancy's little game, sir," Ebenezer continued. "He ought to know better, sir, for he's old enough, and a regular attendant at church. Then there's young Mr. Yarn, sir, he's very friendly with her too, though his pa knows nothing of it. I regret to own, sir, that Mrs. Fuller is his confidante, as she is of a good many others. Madame de Montfort has elderly admirers, too. They couldn't get on without them very well, sir. It's the old gentlemen as finds the money, sir, mostly; and the carriages and pairs, and the little villas outside the town, owned by ladies of the corps de ballet, are paid for by gentlemen that one would have thought had given over the vanities of this wicked world, sir. Saving

your presence, gentlemen, the history of Susannah and the Elders is being repeated every day."

"Have you taken any to anyone else?" inquired Sam, filling the glass which Ebenezer held out.

"Yes, sir. I took a bouquet to Miss Beauville, sir, with a letter in the middle of it," Ebenezer replied.

"Hang Beauville!" exclaimed Sam.

"Certainly, sir, if you wish it," Ebenezer said, solemnly.

"Well, now, have you—have you taken any to Miss Zulmann?" Sam gulped the words out with an effort, and half made up his mind to have Mr. Fuller's blood there and then.

"Yes, sir," Ebenezer replied, meekly, as he cast down his eyes.

"How many?" inquired Sam, who was pulling at his shirt-cuffs, and feeling his knuckles, alternately.

"Only one, sir. Only a little one, as I'm a repentant sinner," Ebenezer said.

"And—and what did she do with it?" gasped Sam, as he expectorated in his hand, and doubled his fist, as little street boys do when they meditate a breach of the peace.

"Oh! sir, Miss Zulmann is very violent, sir. She's quick of temper, like the gentleman, your friend, sir," said Ebenezer, in a sanctimonious voice. "She tore it in pieces, sir, and threatened to push them down my throat with her silk umbrella."

"Now, Ebenezer," said Sam, taking up a table knife, and slowly stropping it on his patent-leather boot, "you see this knife! Very well. Now tell the truth. Who sent that letter?"

Mr. Fuller pretended not to hear the question.

He finished the brandy in his glass, and rose to depart. "Sir," he said, smoothing his old hat with his coat-sleeve, "it is late, and time for me to be home. I wish you good-evening."

"Not so fast, sir," said Tom rising, and getting between Mr. Fuller and the door, which he locked, placing the key in his pocket. "You heard my friend's question, and you'll have to answer it."

"Sir, you must excuse me," Ebenezer replied, with great humility. "I was employed confidentially, and my conscience won't allow me to betray the confidence reposed in me, sir."

"Sam, give him another glass of brandy," said Tom. "Now then," he continued, taking a sovereign from his pocket and placing it in Mr. Fuller's hand, "let us hear at once who sent you with that letter. If you refuse, I'll break every bone in your great, hulking body."

Ebenezer looked at the coin, spun it in the air, caught it, and dropped it into his pocket. "There's no refusing you, sir," he replied, leering at the lad out of his cunning little eyes. "You have such a pleasant, insinuating manner with you. I'll tell you, sir. My employer's name is Parkes."

"D——n!" shouted the lad, catching Ebenezer by the throat, and shaking the craven-hearted scoundrel as a man might shake a child. And perhaps the recording angel who blotted out the oath which uncle Toby swore also dropped a tear on Tom's, for the oath was sworn in hatred and abhorrence of the crimes of a villain."

"Sir! Sir!" gasped Ebenezer. "I pray you will release me. I'm—I'm suffocating."

"Is the man you name the merchant and ship-owner whose vessels always go down?" asked Tom, through his clenched teeth.

"Yes, sir; but—release me. I'm—I'm——" gurgled Ebenezer.

"Then go down on your knees, for by the Lord you shall die," said the lad, grimly, while his fingers played a horrible tune on Ebenezer's throat.

"Oh! good sir! Oh! dear, kind sir, I'm not fit to die," gasped the cowardly sinner. "Only let me live to repent of all my villainies, and I'll tell you all. I know all, good sir. Dear Mr. Beaufort, plead for me."

"Perhaps he can tell us something!" said Sam. "Give the old sinner a chance."

"I'd much rather kill him," Tom replied, quietly, as he took his hand from the other's throat. "Now, you scoundrel, speak out, or I'll finish you," he said, addressing the kneeling Ebenezer.

"I will, sir. I'll tell you the truth, sir! s'elp me God, I will," the coward wept. "Miss Zulmann is to be carried off to-night, sir, by Mr. Parkes. She's spending the evening at a friend's, and they've squared a cabman to be near the house when she leaves. If she doesn't engage him to take her home, Parkes and two other men will seize her, and force her into the coach. A boat is waiting somewhere by the docks, and she'll be on board the schooner *Maria* by midnight. And it must be eleven o'clock now, and unless you look sharp you'll be too late."

An empty porter bottle lay handy on the table, and Ebenezer's head looked uncommonly inviting.

There was a crack—a sound of shattered glass—and Mr. Fuller fell flat on the carpet. "I said I'd have his blood," said Sam, "and now I've kept my promise."

When Ebenezer recovered consciousness, the lads were gone. So he helped himself to the silver forks and spoons, put a ring, which Sam had left on the mantelpiece, in his pocket, and Sam's best hat on his head, and crept quietly down stairs.

CHAPTER II.

The evening on which Mr. Fuller made his celebrated confessions, Marion spent with some friends at their house at Alder Hey. Neither she nor Sam had had to attend at the theatre that night, there being a piece on the boards in which they were not cast. The manner in which she passed the evening with her friends, or what she said to them or they said to her, having nothing to do with this history, we shall confine ourselves strictly to what took place after she had left them. We have no doubt they enjoyed her society, as who could fail to enjoy the society of a young woman eminently beautiful and clever. We are also certain the evening was a pleasant one to her, or she would not have remained so late. Indeed, it was eleven o'clock when the hall-door closed upon her. Marion had not yet arrived at that position in the theatrical world when she would be justified in driving her own brougham, and her friends kept a large and annually increasing family instead of a pair of horses, so that she would either have to walk home or engage a cab. The young gentlemen of the family would have persuaded her to walk, for then they would have had the pleasure of accompanying her, and it's a favour

of no small magnitude to be allowed to escort one of the most beautiful women in the world, to say nothing of that woman being a most accomplished actress. But it was late, and they had to be off to their offices and warehouses in the morning, and she declined. She would go in a cab. It would take her but little time then, and the fare was but two-and-sixpence. So a cab, which was slowly passing at the time, was called, and she slipped in, and fell into a pleasant little train of thought provoked by the hour, by slight fatigue, and by love. *I* am quite prepared to swear to this, although if she were asked, it is possible she might deny it. But I put it to any lady or gentleman who has suffered from the sporting propensities of the blind little archer, and as they need only answer the question to themselves, they will probably be truthful, whether they have not found a slight fatigue or lassitude at night, joined to the motion of a conveyance in which they were taking their solitary ride, the whole machine travelling as though it were asleep, provocative of a building of castles in the air! We are certain it was the case with Marion, and that she went on piling stone upon stone, and brick upon brick, until the building toppled over, at the very moment the cab had come to a full stop. She rubbed the glass window and looked out. "'Twas very extraordinary," she thought. "There were no lamps near. She was sure the whole of the distance from her lodgings to Alder Hey was properly lighted." She let the window down, and with the intention of questioning the cabman, put her head out. It would have been much wiser had she kept her head inside

the cab, for then she might have screamed at the top of her voice, and probably have been heard a mile off; for, if it be true, as I have heard some remark, that a woman's voice carries no weight, I am, on the other hand, prepared to swear it carries a very long way. Not only might she have screamed, but she might have used the pair of scissors attached to her chatelaine on that particular part of her assailant's person which ladies always attack and which gentlemen of the lower orders objurgate, namely their eyes, with considerable effect. But it is possible these thoughts did not occur to her till too late, for she put her head through the window and had it immediately enveloped in the folds of a man's overcoat. She tried to scream then but it was too late. She could not have been heard a yard off, and even if she could have been, there was no one there to help her. At the same moment the doors of the cab were opened and two men got in. One of them wore a pea-jacket, and looked like a sailor. He sat himself on the front seat of the cab, referring as he did so to his eyes in language, which, if not elegant, was forcible. The other was muffled up in a long overcoat, the collar of which was turned up and concealed his face. No one would have taken him for a seaman. He had not the gait, nor the hands—his were fine and white—in fact, there was no sign of tar or pitch about him. He seated himself by Marion's side, and held the wrapper round her shapely head.

"Dont be alarmed," he said, quietly; "no one will hurt you."

"Then let me go, you villain," she replied, as distinctly as circumstances would admit of.

"No! no! I can't do that, you dear girl!" the man said, laughing. "Now I've got you, I must keep you. But you are perfectly safe with me. No one shall harm a hair of your beautiful head."

"Unless you let me go this instant," she murmured, beneath the wrappers, "I will alarm the neighbourhood. Release me, you villain." And she made a fruitless struggle to regain her liberty.

"It's no use, pretty one," he said, holding her by her arms. "I've endeavoured by fair means to win you, but you were too coy. Everything is fair in love, and I love you devotedly. I will make you a charming companion, my beautiful girl, and though to-night I must use violence, though sorely against my will, yet when once you are safe on board the *Maria*, I am your humble servant. We will, in another land, (D.V.) live a life of ease and love. I will be Paul, and you shall be my Virginia."

"Unfortunately for the gentleman who was thus wooing, his legs extended across the bottom of the cab, reaching under the opposite seat. Unfortunately too, Marion was strong in the ankles, and she had on a stout pair of walking boots. She could not box his ears, nor make an assault upon his eyes, as he was holding her arms. But who would have thought of holding her legs? I leave the reader to imagine the cause of the gentleman's sudden anathema, or why he regretted not having provided himself with sticking-plaster. He ceased talking of love, and confined himself during the remainder of the journey, which was not long, to observations made under his breath referring to furies and "brimstones."

At length the cab stopped, and the wrapper was taken from her head. She knew she was near the river, for she heard the waters lashing against the walls. In a moment she was lifted out and carried speechless with terror to a boat, and placed in the stern, where her companions took their places. This was all done in silence. A short, stout, elderly man held the tiller. "Have you done *your* business?" inquired Marion's companion.

"Have I done it, mate? I rather think I have," replied the other. "Now, then, my lads," he continued, addressing the two seamen who held the oars, "push off and be hanged to you."

We must now return to Tom and Sam. When they left the latter's rooms, they hurried away to the house where Marion lodged. If what Mr. Fuller had told them was untrue, she would most likely have returned by the time they got there. But when they inquired for her, they learned she was still absent. They were now certain that the attempt to abduct her had been made. The man Parkes was a notorious villain. Had not Sam seen him and watched him pressing his attentions on Marion? Had not Captain Jack, in drunken confidence, imparted his trade secrets to Tom, or, at least, let fall such hints as could not fail to point out those secrets? Had not Ebenezer, the greasy servant of intrigue, betrayed his employer's confidence, in mortal dread? The truth of his confession was patent enough. They felt certain that perhaps at that very moment she was subject to violence, and was perhaps calling on them for protection.

"I fear the worst, Sam!" said Tom, as they stood

outside the door of the house in which Marion lived. "I am afraid the villain has succeeded in his attempt on the poor girl. Luckily we know the name of his vessel, and by Heaven, if she is there, he shall have more company than he anticipated. Where can we get a boat?"

Sam was in great distress. His love was not only being stolen from him, but stolen by violence. Had this scoundrel Parkes won her fairly, it would have been hard to bear. But how much harder was it when she was being carried off against her will? He loved her very dearly; so dearly that he forgot his own misfortunes in her present danger. He did not think so much of his having failed to win her as of her being at that moment subject to the forced caresses, and, perhaps, violence of a villain; to the brutal admiration of a ship's crew. Perhaps her ripe lips had been defiled; perhaps—but Sam could not venture to give the reins to his imagination any longer. He dashed his silk hat which he had only purchased the week before, on to the pavement, and, in the agony of the moment, kicked the crown in. He buried his hands in his stubby hair, and tugged viciously at it, as though he intended to scalp himself, and take to wigs for the remainder of his life. "I can't stand it, Tom! I shall go mad! I know I shall," he said. "I know I aint a fighting man; and perhaps my pluck isn't quite as much as it might be. But I wish me and that damned villain were opposite each other for five minutes, with a knife apiece. I'd have mine in his black heart before I was two minutes older, if I swung for it."

"Come, come! it's no use talking," Tom replied, placing his hand on Sam's shoulder. "While we are here talking about it, they may be carrying her off. Can we get a boat?"

"That's no use," Sam said, placing his crownless hat solemnly on his head. "I'm calm now, old feller. As you say, while I'm damaging my properties here, perhaps she is calling on us for help; so I'll try to control myself. It's no use our thinking to get a boat. We could not tell where to find the schooner if we did. Our plan will be to go to the police office at once."

So they hailed a cab that was passing and bid the driver take them to the police office. Had they known it was the very conveyance which had taken Marion to the boat, it is probable that cabman would have been strangled.

When they entered the office the night inspector was making entries in the charge-sheet. Most of them appeared to be charges of drunkenness. He was a smart, dapper man, with an eye like a knife. He looked the young fellows over, and seeing Sam's slightly disordered dress and the battered condition of his hat, made a mental observation that they had been probably in queer company. At length, having finished his entries, he placed his pen behind his ear, and said, looking them hard in the face all the while, "Now, young gentlemen, I don't want to know where you've been, or what you've been up to. You, sir," addressing Tom, "are probably from the country, and perhaps have got into queer company. Now if you make a charge against any one, it will get in the papers, which I've no doubt you would

regard as unpleasant. Mr. Beaufort, I know you, sir. Me and my wife have heard you more than once. Now, sir, I put it to you, would it look nice for Mr. Seymour Beaufort to figure in a police case? 'Pon my word, gentlemen, if you'd take my advice, you'd go home."

"But I say—" Sam began.

"Now really, Mr. Beaufort," the inspector replied in a deprecatory manner.

"Excuse me, Sam, this gentleman I believe is under some misapprehension," Tom interrupted. "We have been nowhere to-night but in my friend's rooms," he continued, addressing the inspector. "We have been in no row, or at least nothing to speak of." Just then he recollected Sam's assault on Ebenezer's head. He regarded his own share in that gentleman's troubles as nothing. We have no charge to make against any one for assault. But we want your assistance. A lady has been forcibly carried off to-night, and taken on board a ship in the river."

"That's a serious offence," the inspector replied. "Did you witness the outrage?"

Tom smiled grimly. "Do I look like it? Is it here, do you think I should be, had I seen it?" he inquired. The inspector looked at him, and his big limbs, his bold grey eyes, and square-cut jaw, and thought he shouldn't like to be the man to try to put the darbies on *his* wrists." After his examination, he assured Tom he didn't think he would.

"How do you know this outrage has taken place, then?" the inspector inquired.

"Miss Zulmann —" Tom began.

"What!" exclaimed the inspector, who was a great patron of the legitimate drama, "not Miss Zulmann of the Theatre Royal, I hope?"

"Yes," Tom replied. "Miss Zulmann had been spending the evening with some friends, and had not returned a quarter of an hour ago."

"But that's no evidence of her having been carried off, you know," the inspector remarked, drumming on his desk with his fingers.

"But we have other evidence," Sam said. "I daresay you know that rascal Fuller, who runs on errands for us at the theatre. He can't have lived so many years in Liverpool without your becoming acquainted with him."

"We know him very well," the inspector replied. "I have my eye on him, and that bad old wife of his."

"Well, then, he disclosed the whole plot this evening," Tom said. "Miss Zulmann, who has been annoyed with this villain's proposals for some time, was to be forcibly carried off to the ship, which will sail at once."

"Humph! How did you obtain this information from Fuller?" the inspector asked. "That man's oath is really worth nothing."

"I fancy he made his disclosures in mortal fear," Tom replied grimly.

"Just so," said Sam. "You see, Mr. Inspector, the rascal dropped some words respecting Miss Zulmann which excited my suspicion. You know he carries letters from all the old and young reprobates in town to the actresses, and some of these he had carried to her. I seized him by the throat; I

forced him on his knees. I said, confess or die. He confessed."

Mr. Inspector smiled. "You must swear an information, and procure a warrant for the man's apprehension, I suppose," he said.

"But, my good sir, what will be the use of that after the vessel has sailed?" Tom replied, impatiently. "Even now we are wasting precious time. Can you assist me personally, or with a couple of your men?"

"I'm afraid not without a warrant. You can't swear an outrage has been committed. It is only suspicion, as yet," replied the inspector.

"Can you put me in communication with anyone who will place us on board the ship, then?" said Tom.

"I don't know. I'm almost afraid not, at this time of night," the inspector replied. "But what is the name of the ship?"

"The *Maria*," Tom said. "And by Heaven, that scoundrel Parkes will escape yet, and poor Marion will be lost. Come, Sam, we must go elsewhere, I suppose."

"Excuse me, sir, but whom did you mention? I think you said Parkes," the inspector observed.

"That is the name of the scoundrel," Tom replied. "I wonder it was not mentioned before."

"I wish it had been. It would have saved us ten minutes," the Inspector said. "If it is Mr. Parkes the merchant and shipowner, he is wanted."

"That's the man," said Tom, excitedly.

"Then he is wanted for forgery. I received the warrant for his apprehension, to-night. We intended

taking him at his house in the morning, and should have been too late, it appears," replied the Inspector, placing the necessary document in the inside pocket of his coat. "'Pon my word gentlemen, I'm obliged to you," he continued. "I'll just put the darbies in my pocket, and take a couple of men, and we'll be off."

The Inspector and the two lads hurried from the station, and the officers followed them. They were hastening to the river police depôt for the assistance of a boat and crew, and to get the warrant executed. When they were near the river, they suddenly heard a voice cry out in the darkness, "Oh! I'm sped."

They listened for a moment to hear from where the cry came. All was as silent as the grave. The only sound was that of the river lashing the walls of the docks.

"Horrible, isn't it," whispered Sam. "A nice place for a quiet gentleman to live in, isn't it?"

"Well! it does seem lively to-night," Mr. Inspector remarked. "That's a case of robbery with violence, I should say. Let us go on; we may drop on some one huddled up on the pavement directly."

They ran as hard as they could in the direction they thought the cry proceeded from. Tom was a few paces in front of the others. Directly he turned the corner of the street, he suddenly stopped and sprang back, right into the Inspector's arms. "My God!" he exclaimed. "Here's murder." Right across the pavement lay the figure of a man, with the bosom of his shirt torn open, and his face turned upwards to the black night.

The Inspector was bending over the prostrate figure in a moment. "Here," he said to one of his men. "Throw your light on his face."

The man did as he was bid, and they saw a dark, gipsy-looking face, with a scar extending from the brow to the jaw. The eyes were wide open, and the lips were slightly drawn back, disclosing the teeth. Tom thought he knew the face, but the events of the night gave him no time for thought.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"I think not," the Inspector replied, placing his hand over the man's heart. "His heart beats, at all events. Let's see where he is damaged."

They lifted him up into a sitting posture, and threw the lights of their lamps on to the pavement. They could see no trace of blood. The inspector again placed his hand over the man's heart. "He's only stunned," he said. "Let me see if I can rouse him;" and he shook the man by the shoulder, and shouted to him to get up.

The man's consciousness began to return. His eyes lost their vacant look. He raised his right hand and placed it on his breast. For one moment he seemed like one making an effort to gather together his scattered senses. Then he rose on to his feet and shook himself, like a dog which had just come out of a river. "Devils!" he muttered. "But that was a shrewd blow. Gabriel's head has stood harder knocks though." Then seeing the police officers by him, he continued, "Hullo! I never thought I should be delighted at seeing your cloth. I am though; I want you! I've been robbed. I'll spoil as pretty a game as was ever planned."

"Now my man," said the inspector, "you had better be off to your home. We can't wait any longer."

"Nay, master," Gabriel replied. "I'm not for home. The bit crack I got over my head is nothing to Gabriel. He's had hundreds worse, and never ached after. I'll see the game played out, and perhaps I'll win yet. They've carried off the girl by this time, but I can tell to a cable's length where the *Maria* lies."

"Has Parkes had his hand in this too?" exclaimed Tom.

"Ay! master, that he has," Gabriel replied, as he examined Tom's face intently. "I know Parkes, and I know Captain Jack, and I ought to know you. If men did not grow older with time, I should say I've seen your face before, and stood up to you like a man and fought you fair. But that was seventeen year ago, and could hardly have been, though Gabriel seldom forgets a face. I was in the *Joseph and Mary*, master, when Captain Jack scuttled her off the Lizard."

"Now, my man, suppose we were inclined to take this Mr. Parkes into custody, would you, or could you lay us alongside his craft," asked the Inspector.

"Would I lay you alongside his craft?" replied Gabriel, raising his clenched fist above his head. "Ay, master, I would. I would steer you straight to Hell, if he was there, and I could get my knife between his ribs."

"Then in Heaven's name, come along," said Tom. "We are losing time every minute we remain here."

They all hastened to the river police depôt, and produced the warrant for the apprehension of Richard Parkes on the charge of forgery. Two of the river police were immediately told off for the duty. There were now eight of them, "quite enough to overcome any resistance, if any should be attempted," the inspector said. They pushed off from the steps out into the tide.

"You know where the *Maria* lies!" said the inspector to Gabriel.

"Ay! master! I do," Gabriel answered.

"Then you had better take the tiller. Drop us alongside quietly."

Gabriel took the tiller, and the men bent to their oars. Aided by the tide, which was on the ebb, the boat passed rapidly down the river; but to the lads, in their deep anxiety and excitement, her progress seemed slow.

"Give me an oar. You have spare ones!" said Tom, pulling off his coat, and seating himself. "Five pounds among you if we reach her in time."

Sam pulled out his purse and counted the contents. "I haven't five pounds about me," he said, "but I'll stand three pound fifteen, and owe you the other one pound five if you reach her. That'll be ten pound altogether, my lads."

"I'm inclined to stand in for that 'ere!" remarked one of the police officers, taking another spare oar.

They bent themselves to their oars in earnest. The ash blades rose and reached back, and feathered and bent, as if worked by machinery. The boat sprang, and leaped, and bounded, and raged down

the black river like some fierce thing on its prey. Not a word was spoken. The rowers with compressed lips, lowered brows, and clenched teeth, pulled until the veins in their throats and arms swelled like knotted whipcord, and their sinews cracked. In the stern, Gabriel stood erect guiding the boat, looking out over the rowers, grim and implacable as fate, while a fierce light burnt in his eyes. They all looked like men on an errand of life or death. They passed the vessels in the river with a fierce dash and a surge. The lights were in front of them, abreast of them, behind them, in a second. The dark waters bubbled, and leaped above the gunwale, and opened to them, and closed after them, while the spray was tossed from the oars in a cloud. The boat raced with the tide, and beat it; it raced with the wind, and beat it. It flew. It was manned by every passion which can urge men to action. Tugging at the oars in a whirlwind of fury, were love, desire of gain, hatred, duty; while revenge stood silent, watchful, implacable, and fierce in the stern.

Presently Gabriel held up his hand. The rowers ceased to pull. "She ought to be within a hundred yards," he said, under his breath. And placing his hands over his eyes he peered into the darkness. He could see nothing. "Pull quietly," he whispered.

Again Gabriel peered out into the night. "She ought to be here," he said to the inspector, who was standing up by his side.

"What is to be done then?" inquired the inspector.

"Follow her, master!" replied Gabriel, grimly.

"They've got on board, and dropped quietly down with the tide. She can't have got far though. They had barely time to get her under weigh. Give way," he said, turning to the rowers, "and make her fly."

They made her fly. Down on the track of her prey she raged in fierce pursuit. At last a grim smile played round Gabriel's set mouth. He held up his hand. Far away on the left they saw the lights of New Brighton glimmer in the night. Away on their right—not two hundred yards away—they saw the dim outline of a small schooner drifting out with the tide under easy sail.

"There's the *Maria*. I'll swear to her," Gabriel said.

Tom unshipped his oar, and fastened his handkerchief round his waist.

"Let us hail her," said the inspector.

"Stop your patter!" interrupted Gabriel, fiercely. "Now then, my lads, send her alongside with a dash."

"Boat ahoy!" called out a voice from the schooner. "Where are you steering? You'll be aboard us in a minute."

No one answered, but they all probably thought the speaker was perfectly correct in his surmise. There was a concussion, and the boat sprang back from the schooner's side as though she had received a blow. But the grappling irons were already fast in the rigging, and she swung to the length of the rope by the schooner's side. They were right beneath the cabin windows. A succession of shrieks were heard, and a smothered curse. All this took

place in twenty seconds. The first shriek had barely startled the night before Tom was swinging himself on to the deck. Gabriel, with an open clasp knife held between his teeth, followed him, but not so quickly as to escape the eye of the police inspector, who dexterously wrenched the weapon from him on the deck and threw it into the river.

Again shrieks were heard from the cabin. With a bound like that of an infuriated young lion, Tom sprang down the companion-ladder, and placing his broad shoulder against the cabin door, he burst it open. A swing lamp hung from the ceiling, and a case-bottle of spirits and a lighted wax candle were on the table. Parkes heard nothing of what had taken place until the cabin door was burst open; then he turned towards the door with an oath. In a moment his face became ashy pale. He raised his hands before him as though to drive away a spectre. "Eversley! Eversley!" he exclaimed, and fell crushed, bleeding, and senseless. Tom had struck him down with all the force intense passion can give to a strong arm, breaking his jaw. In falling he struck the table, upsetting the bottle of spirits and the wax light. Unobserved by all there, a thin, liquid flame ran its snakelike course on the cabin floor, and lost itself through the bulkheads that separated the cabin from the hold of the vessel.

Tom ran to the sofa on which Marion was lying still enough now. "Marion," he said tenderly, "Marion—sister—you are safe. Speak, Marion."

She spoke no word. "Here," he said turning, "some one get some water; she has fainted."

"Let us carry her on deck," said Sam, who now entered the cabin.

They were, however, at that moment unable to move her. Another scene was taking place in the cabin. On the floor lay the body of Parkes. Over him was kneeling Gabriel. The gipsy had followed Tom, and on the fall of his enemy, he had fastened his bony hand on his throat, while revenge and murder were in his eyes. "Liar! Villain! Cheat! Murderer of sailors!" he hissed between his teeth. "Die! die! die!"

"Come! none of this!" said the inspector, sternly, as he and one of his officers wrenched Gabriel's hands from the throat of the unhappy and terrified wretch. "If he is to die, it may as well be at some other's hands. "Richard Parkes," he continued, "I arrest you on a charge of forgery."

The wretch did not speak; he could not. He raised his clasped hands in mute agony, and in a moment was handcuffed like a common felon.

When they had gained the deck from the boat, and while Tom was dashing down the companion-ladder, Captain Jack being down below, the inspector had produced the warrant for Parkes' apprehension, and shown it to the mate who was in charge of the vessel at that moment. That honest fellow would offer no objection. He never liked owners sailing in their own craft. He wasn't agoing to say he was a saint—no! not he. He didn't see much harm if a chap had a lark, if so be the young woman was agreeable. But no one could say as Jack Reefer forced his company on a woman again' her will, and he'd be pretty well dashed afore he would do such

a mean thing. "And I say, mate, d'ye see," says Mr. Reefer, "if the lubber won't come along o' you on the quiet, d'ye see, I'll haul him up with a rope lashed round his heels; for now you got that 'ere slip of paper, d'ye see, and its no mutiny, by Jove, I don't care a rope's-end for all the owners in Liverpool, d'ye see!"

The inspector did see, and the result was that Mr. Parkes found himself handcuffed in about three seconds more. In the meantime, Captain Jack, hearing something unusual going on on deck, made his appearance there, and after receiving information on the subject from Mr. Reefer, he first broke that gentleman's head with a marling-spike, and then proceeded to inform him that he, and no other person whatsoever, was the master of the *Maria*, and he would serve out any lubber who said he wasn't.

Having made these observations, he went to the top of the companion-ladder for the purpose of descending to the cabin, just when the police officers were bringing their prisoner on deck.

"So you're nabbed, are you?" he said, addressing his owner. "Never mind! I'll look after the craft and take her all right into port. I suppose we needn't wait for you to come off again. No! well, don't try to speak. But who's this? By Jove, here's the young game cockerel again!" And he fixed his bloodshot eyes, which blinked in the light of the oil lamps, on Tom, and seemed to say "Now, my good fellow, you've dropped across me once too often; I'll serve you out this time."

Tom's eyes answered the challenge. It is possible

that Captain Jack thought he would be obliged to attack the other in self-defence. Such fancies do occur to people with less reason. To this young fellow he had dropped words which might lead to unpleasant inquiries. He had, in his cups, hinted at secrets he had better not have whispered to himself even. This young lad had bearded him at the theatre when he was keeping the whole house at bay, and it must be confessed, cowed him. Captain Jack was superstitious; he had his dreams and his visions in the night; he saw men throw aloft their arms and sink beneath the waves, not only in his sleep, but in his waking moments. More than once he had sprung from his bed, when on shore, with that sound, which, once heard, is never forgotten—the death cry of drowning men. He believed that the fishes ate the bodies of those drowned sailors, but that their spirits walked continually. He was as certain that they stood at his bedside at night, behind him at table, beside him in eating, in drinking, in sleeping, in waking, as he felt sure of his own existence. Had you questioned him on the subject in his sober moments, it is possible he would have called you a something-or-other fool. Were you to put the same question to him after dark, he would cast a terrified glance over his shoulder, and ask for brandy. He believed in phantom ships, and that the *Flying Dutchman* still sailed the seas to the south of the Cape; that there was no mistake about the deathwatch, and that you can read fortunes in the wick of a tallow candle.

He knew nothing of Pixies, like the valiant men of Cornwall and Devon, for he had never heard of

them; but he believed that strange shapes are seen on the rigging of ships, and that in certain latitudes, whereabout he could not say, there were strange shapes in the waters with faces and long hair like a woman, and tails like a fish. It is, therefore, possible that some vague idea occurred to him that this young fellow, who had crossed his path and who had defied him, was in some way connected with the lost men who had manned his ill-fated ships. It is possible he began to connect the living in some strange bond with the dead; that the souls of those who had gone down at sea, their lives betrayed by him, had found in the young man an avenger. Perhaps he thought *they* were looking on, that their ghastly faces jeered, their hollow eyes mocked him, and that their ghostly arms were held out to carry him down, down, down into the depths of the cold, dark sea. But no, he could not drown! A wise woman had told him he would never meet his death by water. He would laugh at their jeers. Ghosts were but air, he thought. *They* could not drown him. Mortal man he never feared. He would never turn his back on mortal man, if he were but certain he was mortal. He was of the true bull-dog breed. Give him his grip, and he'd hold till death. In Tom's mind strange thoughts were born, and strange fancies arose and danced hurly-burly through *his* brain. He seemed to hear the cries of drowning men too: their cry to him was, "Vengeance! vengeance! Give to us him who betrayed us to death!" He seemed to hear the cry of their wives and their children: their cry was, "Vengeance! vengeance! Give him to death who made us widows and orphans."

He seemed to hear the cry of all honest, noble-hearted men, created in the image of God, and who had not turned that image of God into a likeness of the devil, by lust, greed, and covetousness; and their cry was, "Vengeance! vengeance! Give him to death who has shamed our manhood." He saw before him a murderer of the blackest dye! To place his foot on his neck were a duty. He lost his calm judgment, and became blinded by blood. The smell of salt water has a tendency to develop a fighting mania in all young Englishmen. He was, as the late Mr. Charles Kingsley would have said, run Berserk mad. It comes out in all of us sometimes. Some get it stronger than others. Tom had it. His eyes answered Captain Jack's. Like an electric spark, something told those two men—so different in everything but their great strength; so different in their persons, their attributes, their hopes, their fears—that in another moment they would be engaged in a death struggle. "For God's sake, keep those two men asunder, or there'll be murder," said the inspector. It was too late; the lad had sprung on the object of his madness with the ferocity of a panther. The latter received him unmoved, as a rock receives the fierce dash of the angry ocean. They grappled. They leaped from side to side. The captain, with his immense strength, would lift the young gladiator bodily off the deck and swing him like a child. The other would clasp his older antagonist by the middle, and force him backwards until one would have thought they must have fallen. No one dared attempt to separate them. They stood horrified spectators of the struggle. Neither of the combatants felt fatigued.

Their grasps on each other's throats never once relaxed. "I will die, or thou shalt die!" their eyes said to each other. But a new feature presented itself. The burning spirits from the cabin-floor had carried the flame into the hold, which was stowed with goods of an inflammable nature. The flames speedily made headway, for they were undiscovered, and raged below unchecked. Suddenly a tongue of living flame leaped up through the hatchway. It had gone too far for control or extinction. In a few moments the whole middle part of the ship was in flames. At this moment the captain remembered that the notes he had taken from Gabriel were in the after-part of the ship. The notes and securities which the prisoner had taken with him were in his cabin. If he could get to the after-part of the schooner, he could secure them and be rich. No one would know what had, or what had not been burnt. He would leave his desire for Tom's life—for in one minute the desire which had been unconsciously struggling into existence had attained maturity, and had become almost a madness—he would leave it until some other time. With a supreme effort, he burst from the lad's fierce embrace, and sprang into the rigging. In a moment the young fellow saw the danger. They were getting the boats out now. Marion was being lowered into the police boat."

"Who'll take Miss Zulmann?" shouted one.

"I will!" said the police inspector.

"Give her to me!" said Sam. "Lower her gently!"

But why was that shriek, now she was in the arms

of friends? They were all in the boats now, except Tom and the Captain. The former was standing on the bulwarks, naked to his waist. The light of the flames fell in lurid flashes on his white chest and dark, frowning face. It was then that Marion's shriek rang out on the night. "Tom! Tom! my darling! he's lost," she cried.

One man alone seemed to keep his presence of mind. He seized the oars and forced the boat as near to the burning vessel as was safe. Then standing up on the seat, Gabriel shouted, "Jump overboard! We'll save you. It's your only chance."

It was his only chance. He saw it. The Berserk fit had left him. He looked for one moment at the eager flames as they almost touched him, and then at the dark waters, and putting his trust in God and Gabriel, over he went, and down he went. The tide carried him clear of the schooner, and the moment he appeared on the surface Gabriel's hand was on him, and a dozen strong arms lifted him into the boat. The flames now lit up the whole scene, until it was as light as day. Tom, it has been said, was naked to the waist. His shirt and he had parted company in his death grapple with the captain. On his bare shoulder, in characters an inch long, were the letters T. B. And everyone saw them and wondered. And Marion saw them and stored them in her memory. And Gabriel saw them and remembered them. "Devils!" he muttered; "'tis the kinchin. I'll not lose sight of you again."

In the meantime the captain had mounted into the rigging, and had crossed from the foremast to

the mainmast, with the intention of reaching the after-part of the ship by the back-stays, when the flames overtook him. They leaped upwards, and around him, and below him, and above him, like fiery serpents. The whole of the standing rigging was on fire. The flames stifled him with their hot breath; they scorched his hair, his face, his hands; they blasted his sight. He looked down; there was a raging fire. He looked backwards—the foremast was one sheet of flame. Danger, and fire, and death were everywhere. Where now were the ghosts who haunted his hours of darkness? Where now were the jeering, ghastly faces, the hollow eyes, the shadowy arms? Everywhere! They sat on the topmast, and jeered him from there. They sat on the cross-trees, and mocked him from there. They appeared in the midst of the flames, and hailed him from there. He looked down into the rolling tide, and their shadowy arms were uplifted to receive him there. But the wise woman had said he should not meet his death by water. Here was death on every side but that. He stood grasping the topmast shrouds, and determined to risk it. Off, then, into mid-air he sprang, among the running rigging which hung loose from the topmast. Into the running noose of a rope he dropped. It closed in cruel folds on his burly bull-like neck, and he hung like the felon he was from his own topmast, and the flames leaped, and sprang, as if in eager and mad ferocity to scorch him, and burn him, and consume him.

Everyone in the boats was sick at the horrible sight, but one. Everyone there covered his eyes

with his hands, but one. No one there said a word for the hardened ruffian, but one.

"He was a rare plucked one!" Gabriel observed. And so great is the power of this to cover or hide a multitude of sins, that more than one who detested his crimes, found himself forgetting those crimes in admiration of his bull-dog courage.

Just then there was a terrific report. The masts shot up clean into the air, and fell hissing into the river. And in a few moments all that was left of the *Maria* were a few burning spars or planks, which sputtered and hissed for a while in the water, and then went out. They found the maintopmast, but nothing of Captain Jack was ever seen or heard of after.

They sent Marion home under guard of the police; and Sam and Tom, the latter being clothed in borrowed plumes, hastened to their rooms. Tom had pressed her hand in his at parting, and had looked into her eyes. But he had said nothing. And she had made no sign. Those eyes, though, told a tale of love and devotion. She wondered next day, how it was, or what it was that caused Tom to leave for The Moat without again seeing her. She need not have wondered. Tom was a gentleman—as noble and chivalrous as any knight who had ever entered the lists. He had heard her cry from the boat, as he stood on the bulwarks of the burning vessel. He had looked into her glorious eyes, and read there a story which Sam would have given his life to have read. He began to have an idea—a strange, thrilling pleasure, utterly unfelt until that moment, and utterly unlike that other pleasure he had experienced on the night of the

ball—that the lovely girl whom he had called sister loved him with more than a sister's love. And so, in the early morning, he knelt down by his bedside, and said, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," and then rose up and packed his portmanteau, and like a noble English gentleman as he was, went quietly home.

CHAPTER III.

So Tom went home to his uncle, to his sports, to his —love we were going to say, but a change had taken place in him. The horizon of the future which had appeared so bright, was now darkened by an ominous cloud. Hope, which had before been seated behind him on the saddle, had now dismounted, and Care forced its company on him. He took to smoking more than ever. He became sarcastic and moody, and altogether unpleasant company. Mr. Bogey had chaffed him on his engagement to Constance, which you may be sure everybody knew, although Tom had not spoken of it to his uncle. He informed that facetious young gentleman that he hated chaff, and sat upon him to such an extent, that he offered a lame apology. "Don't get into a rage about it, old feller!" he said. "*I* can't help it, you know. Everybody says you are, and old mother Revell says you are. But if you're not, say so, and I'll grieve with you or rejoice with you, just as you like. I will, 'pon my word. And you can't make that thirty pound a fifty, I s'pose, can you, old feller? I dropped such a heap of money on that mare of yours."

Tom was in the very worst humour possible to

lend money. He was on bad terms with himself, and with all the world. He was in a most unchristianlike spirit. He refused Mr. Bogey's request. He told that young gentleman, that if he went on like this, he really could not afford to be intimate with him. That the pleasure of his society was no doubt very great, but that he was afraid he could not afford to pay the price, and a great deal more of similar causticity. From all this Mr. Bogey gathered his own conclusions. He could see as far through a mile-post as most people, he informed her ladyship, his mother. "Seedly is nabbed, regularly boned," he gleefully observed. "He popped the question to Miss Revell at the ball, and now wants to cry off. But that old woman will see him hanged first, and he'll have to marry her whether he likes it or no! he! he! he!"

We will not go so far as Mr. Bogey went, and say that Tom wanted to cry off. We will say, however, he was in a very uncertain state of mind. He still thought Constance beautiful, and good, and charming. He still felt a desire to be in her company, to look into her dark eyes, to press her hand, to call her his. And while he was assuring himself that he should be very happy with her for his wife, the thought of Marion would burst in upon him like a blow on his heart. A sinking sensation would come over him, and an idea would cross his brain, that everything in this world was unfortunate; that the game was not worth the candle—that those who were dead were a great deal better off, for death meant rest. He felt that Marion loved him. Had not his word been pledged to Constance, he would lay his heart

at Marion's feet. How blind he had been before! Her beauty, her modesty, her goodness, were as far above the beauty, the modesty, the goodness of all other women, as the light of the sun is above that of a gas-lamp. On the other hand, had he not known Marion, he could have been as happy as it is the lot of most of us to be with Constance. A most unpleasant state of things, we must grant. And so he smoked and fretted, and lost his spirits, and his fine healthy colour, and lay awake at nights, wishing he was dead, or that he had never known Marion, or that the ball had taken place the night after he had returned from Liverpool instead of the night before. And he never once went fishing, and stopped away for a whole fortnight after his return, from The Cottage.

Mr. Seedly had noticed this change in the lad. He saw him daily going off his feed, as he termed it, growing thinner, and paler, and irritable. He never cared to go out of the house, but lay smoking and brooding all the day long. You may be sure the rumours of Tom's engagement did not fail to reach the little man's ears. He heard of it within two days after the ball. He thought that there was plenty of time before the lad, and that he need have been in no hurry to choose a wife. But then his memory carried him back to the time when he was Tom's age, and he acknowledged to himself that the heart of youth is open to soft impressions, and that perhaps an early marriage was the best thing for a young fellow, and would keep him steady. But he was disappointed that Tom had said nothing to him on the subject. His wish was that the lad should

regard him in all things as his dearest friend; that there should be implicit confidence between them. But when he found that Tom said nothing, he began to think that age must make a difference—must be a barrier between them; and that, perhaps, after all, an old fellow was not the sort of companion a young lad would voluntarily choose. And so he watched Tom more narrowly than usual. He began to notice the dark rings round his eyes, and his lassitude when he came down in the morning; that instead of making the splendid breakfasts he used to do, he now scarcely touched anything; that he showed no interest in any of the things he used to be interested in, and mooned the day away until the dinner hour, when he would eat very little, but drink a good deal.

The little man began to get troubled. Here was the lad he loved more than all the world regularly running to seed. The evenings at The Moat were not very pleasant during this fortnight. When the little man tried to force the conversation, Tom would be staring vacantly across the table. If he asked him a question, the chances were he would receive an answer quite irrelevant. And so he determined to speak to him on the subject. "The boy has something on his mind," he thought. "Though I won't force myself into his confidence, yet I'll try to show him that what hurts him hurts me; that when he suffers I suffer; that in eating his heart out like this he is wounding mine. I'll say to him, 'Tom, if you have any grief, let me share it. A grief divided is a grief half healed. If you have any hopes which you think are beyond you, let me

share them. Standing on my shoulders you can reach higher than from your own feet.'"

Having come to this determination, he said one morning after breakfast, "Tom, my boy, I have no wish to pry into your private concerns, but I should be blind if I had not noticed you were ill—that something has occurred to annoy you, and that you are fretting. I don't wish to force myself into your confidence; but if you will admit me, I think you will be easier, and I know I shall be much happier."

The young fellow remained silent for some time. At last he looked up, and his eyes were very dim, as he said, "My dear uncle, your kindness and your watchful love quite unman me. I ought to have told you everything. I ought never to have had a secret from you. But there are some secrets we don't like to tell. Some secrets lose half their pain by being shared, others half their pleasure. I did not confide in you when my secret was pleasant—why, then, should I pain you by confiding in you what I know would give you pain?"

The little man smiled affectionately on the lad. "Now we are getting on!" he said. "But your reasoning, Tom, doesn't hold water. Though two negatives are equal to one affirmative, yet I never heard before that two wrongs make one right. You say you ought to have told me everything. Very well! you commit a sin of omission in not confiding in me, in the first instance. But you don't square matters by not confiding in me in the second. If you had a secret which gave you pleasure, wouldn't I have rejoiced with you, and flung up my hat and cried 'hurrah' as loud as yourself? If it causes you

pain, won't I share it, and scheme and contrive to help you out of any mess you've got into? You young fellows think that when we old boys can run in the race no longer, we turn ourselves, so to speak, out at grass, and do nothing but eat and drink, and drive the flies away; that the shouts of the spectators, the roar of the ring, the sight of the youngsters running over the course, don't stir our old blood; that we do not look back on the times when *we* contended in the world's race. But you are mistaken. If we are too fat, or too old, or what not, to run ourselves, we can watch the youngsters in the race, and back our fancy, and hurrah if he wins, or go home and fret, and mope, if he loses. If we cannot go in against you young fellows, or have become too old for your loves, your ambitions, your pleasures, be sure we, too, have felt like you; that we have hoped, and despaired; have run; have stumbled; have won our prize, or perhaps have lost it. And experience is worth something. We know where the galloping ground is good, and where it is bad, for we have gone over it. We can, perhaps, tell you what to do, and what to avoid doing. At any rate, we can shout and drink a bumper to the winner; or, if our horse loses, we can take him home and doctor him, and get him fit again, and bring him out, and see him after all win a big stake. Now out with it, Tom! I've heard some rumours lately about you and our young friend at Chirkwell. Nothing to your disadvantage or hers. Quite the reverse in fact. Now is it this that has upset you?"

"It is," Tom replied, blushing painfully. He then told the little man everything. Of the hours

he had spent at the cottage, and of their kindness to him there. He told him that he thought, from the first day he had seen her, he had never met any woman so beautiful or so clever as Constance. That he began to take the greatest pleasure in her society, and that to miss a day without seeing her, was to lose a day. He told him what the Bogey girls had said of her, but that, instead of it turning him from her, he believed those things to be untruths, and that abused, she seemed the more beautiful. That comparing her with other girls whom they were in the habit of meeting was but adding new charms to her, and that he thought he loved her truly and fondly. That he had intended speaking to Mr. Seedly first; but that at the ball, the lights, the wine, the women, the attention he attracted, had excited him, and through their medium he only saw Constance more beautiful than ever. He said he had told her he loved her, had asked her to be his wife, and that she had consented. And then he went on to speak of Marion; of their early friendship; of the hours they had studied together. He spoke with a kindling eye of her wondrous beauty, and referred in respectful terms to her talent and acknowledged ability. He assured the little man of her purity, her goodness, her modesty. And then he came to speak of the last time he had seen her. "I had always a regard for her," he said. "I have told her hundreds of times I looked on her as a sister. But I always found the thought of the possibility of her marrying anyone exceedingly distasteful. Then that night came. I thought it was natural that I should rage and go mad when

she was in danger. But I know now that no man becomes as I became then for any woman unless she is *very* dear to him. I heard her cry from the boat when I was in danger. I suspected then *I* was dear to her too. But when I looked into her eyes that night I knew she loved me. And," he added, turning ashy pale, and burying his face in his hands with a convulsive sob, "I knew then *I* loved *her*, too. And, at that very moment, God help me, I was promised to another woman."

"Poor lad! Poor lad!" said the little man in a pitying voice. "Is there no escape, do you think?"

"I see none! none!" Tom answered. "I have brooded over it. I have, like uncle Toby," and here he smiled feebly, "reckoned up her charms and claims on my regard, on my fingers. I have declared to myself, that my word being once given, could not be recalled. I have tried to persuade myself that I would not have my promise back, even if I could; that I still love her, and that I would that instant start off to the cottage, where, you know, I have not been since I've returned. I've told myself I am the most fortunate of men, and that with her no man could fail to be happy. And at the next moment I have wished I had gone down locked in a death grapple with that ruffian, Captain Jack, in a storm of rage and madness. For there was a fierce happiness in that!" And his eyes glittered and his nostrils expanded, as if he again sniffed the battle.

Mr. Seedly looked the picture of perplexity and compassion. "Do you think she could be induced to throw you over!" he inquired.

"No, I'm sure she wouldn't," he replied, decisively. "I don't think she would ever consent to give me up. She's *so* fond of me." I've no doubt the reader will be excessively amused at this. The present writer has laughed many times when he has thought of poor Tom's vanity, and blindness, and believes that had Constance at that time sent him off with a flea in his ear, to make way for someone else who was a bigger fool, or better looking, or perhaps richer, he would have been half inclined to look on himself as the most ill-used man in the world, and would probably have done nothing for a whole week but find rhymes for "despair," and then gone off and laid his broken, bleeding, lacerated heart, at the feet of Marion.

"It's a terrible state of things," the little man said, thinking probably of his own early troubles. "It's just such another affair as your poor mother's, only she was over-persuaded in accepting me. She found she could not untie the knot, and so she cut it. You couldn't do the same, I suppose, Tom?"

"No, I am bound in honour to keep my promise." Tom replied with a sigh.

"What a thing a man's word is!" observed the little man. "It ties one faster than bands of iron. My poor lad, you must try not to think of Marion. Keep away from her. Don't go near her, and trust that time will put all to rights again. I can see no other way, unless our old friend Maggs can enlighten us. I'm not certain, you know, that a promise given when a young fellow has been taking wine freely is binding. I think there are some circumstances when his word is more honoured in the breach than

in the observance. Now Maggs, I'm certain, is the very soul of honour. Besides, he loves you as though you were his son, and your happiness and your honour are both equally dear to him. He is coming here this afternoon respecting little Polly. You recollect Polly, my poor old friend Wright's daughter. We are going to send her away to school, and Maggs and his wife are coming here about it. Suppose we put the affair to them!"

Tom consented. All the world had now heard of his proposal to Constance, and why should not his old friends the Maggses. He would be sure to tell them some time, so they might as well hear it now, and perhaps aid him with their advice. So when Mr. Maggs and his wife appeared, the whole affair was laid before them. They both looked pleased and knowing when Mr. Seedly told them that Constance had accepted Tom. They both thought that she was quite right to accept him, and that there were few young fellows who were finer, or better looking lads than their Tom. But when they heard that Tom had made a mistake, that he loved Marion with a deep and strong love, and that it was only too probable that his affection was returned, their smiles faded away. The joke Mr. Maggs was making up in his mind to crack presently was forgotten. They shook their heads, and seemed lost in perplexity.

"This is the rummest go ever I see!" Mr. Maggs said. "Here our Tom goes and falls in love with a wery nice young woman from his own account, and she says she'll have him. The next day he goes and falls wery much in love with another young woman, as he think 'll have him, if he asks her.

It's wery strange. He can't love the both on 'em, can he? Tom, can you love the both o' them young females?"

Tom did not answer this question. There were intricacies and complications in it he could not unravel. He knew he loved Marion. He was not certain he did not love Constance. He felt sure he could do so, were there no Marion, or had he never seen her. So instead of answering Mr. Maggs's question he hid his face in his hands, and remained silent.

"P'raps you aren't sure," Mr. Maggs continued, "I aren't sure myself. I've often said, Belle Vue is the nicest place in the world. I went to the Pomona Gardens the other day, and then I thought them the best. Then I went to Belle Vue again, to make sure, and blow me, if I didn't think there never was such a place. I could be wery happy at either. P'raps Tom could love either o' them young women—p'raps"—and Mr. Maggs looked as though there were a remote possibility of it—"P'raps our Tom could like the both on 'em at the same time. Could he fall in love with both on 'em, mother?"

"Certainly not!" mother replied.

"Well, *you* know!" Mr. Maggs said. "I wasn't sure; I thought p'raps he might. Some people are wery gifted one way, and some are wery gifted another. I didn't know but p'raps he might be able to love both on 'em. But even if he did, what's the use? he daren't do it. The law is dead again' it, the women is dead again' it. Even if he could buckle to the both on'em, he daren't. They wouldn't stand him. They wouldn't stand each other. They'd be sure to fight, wouldn't they mother?"

"Certainly, Samwel!" Mrs. Maggs replied.

"Wery well, then," continued Mr. Maggs. "It's settled he can't have both on 'em. Just so. Wery good. But if he can't have both, he's welcome kindly to one. If so, which one? If so be he hasn't asked this one, is he obliged to ask her? Certain'y not. If so be he has asked the other, and she's said yes, is he obligated to splice her? Certain'y not. But what comes arter? A breach of promise soot, his letters are read in court, and the young woman gets raspin' damages to heal her wounded feelin's. Is that all? Certain'y not. What comes arter, then? I'm wery proud to say I don't know. If proud, why proud? because I never bruk *my* word. Do I say right, mother, or do I not say right?"

"You say right, Samwel!" Mrs. Maggs replied.

"Wery well, then!" Mr. Maggs continued. "Is this 'ere to be applied to our Tom? Suppose we say yes. Then if yes, why yes? because our Tom is a gentleman. And if a gentleman, why then? because a gentleman's word is his bond. Wery good. Then in this 'ere case, what'll our Tom do?"

"Chuck her over," Mrs. Maggs answered.

"What!" exclaimed her husband, incredulously.

"Chuck her over," Mrs. Maggs repeated, emphatically.

"But you said quite different just now," Mr. Maggs urged on his wife's consideration. "Tom has give his word. A man's word should be a man's bond. Them's your own words. Or if not your own, you said you agreed to 'em."

"And so I do," Mrs. Maggs replied, determinedly.

"I do hold to 'em, as long as they don't put our Tom in a hole. I said chuck her over, and I mean chuck her over. Suppose he did talk a lot of nonsense to her. Wasn't it at this 'ere ball, and arter supper, when I daresay he had had a little wine, and was elewated. Is a young feller to be pinned down hard and fast to what he says when a bit sprung? A man's word is *not* his bond then. If so, why not?" continued Mrs. Maggs, growing bold in what she believed to be Tom's cause, and at the same time falling into her husband's mode of expression. "If so, why not? Is a man without wit to be kept to his word? What did Solomon say? 'when the wine is in, the wit is out.' Tom had had his wine, and p'raps more than his share. What then? His wit was out. What then? The words he spoke—that is, if he did say 'em"—and she looked as though she had considerable doubts on the subject, and on small provocation would swear he never did say them—"was of no account. What then? chuck her over."

"But *was* Tom sprung? that's the question!" argued Mr. Maggs. "If so be he was sprung when he gave his word to the young woman, I'll not go for to say he must stick to it. Ask him hisself. Was you sprung, Tom, when you give your word?"

"I was not," Tom replied, with his face still hidden between his hands. "I was excited, but I believed what I told her."

"There you are!" said Mr. Maggs, waving his hand. "He believed what he said, though he was excited. What do you say to that, mother?"

"What do I say to that?" returned Mrs. Maggs,

with intense scorn. "What do I say to that? why chuck her over. Was you ever excited Samwel? Have I never heard you when you was up, blow your own eyes? Yes, I have. What then? Must your eyes be blowed because you said them words when you was up? No! certain'y not. If not, why not? Because when you was up, you didn't know what you was saying. And if you didn't know what you was a-saying, you oughtn't to be expected to stick to what you said. Must our Tom, then, be made to stick to what he said, when he was up? No. What then? Chuck her over."

"It seems to me you're wery perwerse to-day, old woman," said Mr. Maggs to his wife. "What do you say to that?"

"Chuck her over," replied Mrs. Maggs, obstinately.

"Well, it's no use argyfying!" said Mr. Maggs. Tom give his word. "Wery well! he must stand to it. If so be she give him up, wery good. Then he can try the other 'un. If so be she won't give him up; what then? He must put up with a little illconwenience. Illconwenience and sorra is the lot of us all. I aren't partial to much on it, I do allow. But it wery often happens a little of it will do a feller good. Suppose it is a burden! what then? Every back has got its load, and every load is made to fit the back. If so be he takes this 'ere young woman; what then? She makes him a purty decent wife, I daresay, and 'll look arter his linen, and mind the babies when they come. Not much in that, I reckon? No, certain'y not. Suppose he cries off, what then? Why then I pities him, for he'll have bruk his word, and smashed his honor."

"Maggs, I've no patience with you," Mrs. Maggs replied, with considerable warmth. "What you say is all fiddle-sticks'-end. You goes on about honour and such tom-foolery! I say nothing is dishonourable that's reasonable. Is there reason in what you say? No. If not, why not? Because it aren't reasonable that a young feller should be bound to what he didn't mean, or if he did mean it then, what he's been repentin' on ever since. It aren't reasonable that our Tom should make hisself miserable for life, for the sake of some gammon or other he said arter supper with champagne. It aren't reasonable for him to fret hisself to death, and lose his appetite, and look like a white-warshed wall. Suppose he kep' his word to this 'ere female—I won't call her a woman, for if she had the spirit of a woman, she'd give him up—is he going to be 'appy? No. If he makes her his missus and don't care for her, is it likely he'll smoke his pipe quietly in his own chimbley-corner? No. If he don't stop home at nights but goes off a billiarding and a public-housing, will she be happy? No. And if she aren't 'appy, will she smile on him when he comes home, and try and make the house tidy, and things comfortable for him? No, certainly not. Then chuck her over."

"Wery well, mother. You puts it strong," said Mr. Maggs, approvingly. "I like to see you stand up for our boys, I do. You sticks up for 'em like a man. I'll not deny there's a good deal o' truth in what you say. You puts it wery plain and wery forcible. But *I'm* not convinced. And I says Tom, you're on your honour, and on your word.

Then stand to your honour and your word like a man."

"And I says, you don't know what you're a-talking about," replied Mrs. Maggs. "What do you or anybody know what honour is? Who's the feller as said this is honourable, or that is not honourable? And if so, who told *him* to do it? Who said as he should make rules for people as perhaps is as wise and clever as hisself? How do you or he know 'tis honourable for Tom to go and make hisself wretched for life, and the young woman miserable, as she's sure to be, and the other pore thing un'appy? How do you know, Samwel, but what it's honourabler to be happy hisself, and make the other pore girl 'appy as is fond of him and he's fond of? If Providence puts happiness in your way, *I* don't count it honourable to go and fly in the face of Providence. Very well, what then? Chuck her over!" And she emphasised her words by dashing her umbrella, which she could never be persuaded to part with, on the floor.

Now when Tom had knelt down by his bedside that morning in Liverpool, and had asked "not to be led into temptation," he had miscalculated his own strength. He thought that if he could keep away from Marion the disease would in time work its own cure. He thought he would be able to strangle this passion, and put it away and bury it, and in time forget it, and at the same time cultivate, and nurse, and force up that other love which was now withered and almost dead. And though that latter love did sometimes hold up its head and make a struggle for life, yet the former passion being

a stronger plant, and having deeper roots, overshadowed it, asserted its mastery over it, and choked it. The lad was undergoing a great inward struggle. Mrs. Maggs's arguments, strengthened by his own desires, attacked his heart. Mr. Maggs's arguments, backed by his sense of honour, attacked his head. And there the battle raged—a fierce fight between love and duty. It was a terrible ordeal for the young fellow to go through. If he kept his word to Constance, he never could hope to be thoroughly happy; he never would be able to do *her* justice. Everything she did, everything she said, would suffer by comparison with what Marion would have done or said. His heart would always be a traitor, and continually point back—back, when there was no such word as "return" for him—to what he had lost. He would be for ever picturing to himself what *might* have been. And how would he regard the obstacle to those desires? Could he love and cherish her, his fidelity to whom was his curse? What if he should perjure himself, and break his word to her! Would he not be perjuring himself when he should promise before God's altar to love, honour, and cherish her? And there were love, and passion, and wild longing desire pleading to him. And there was duty, cold, passionless and inflexible, commanding him. And duty won. And the young hero—for he *is* a hero who gains a victory over himself, and whose brows may perhaps in that other kingdom which is to come be crowned with immortal flowers—rose up with the beads of sweat on his forehead, and deep lines of suffering about his mouth, and the smile of an angel on his face,

and said, "My dear father and mother, for both you two have been that to me, and my dear uncle, I have decided."

"For God's sake, my dear boy, don't come to a decision hastily," said the little man, hurriedly, for he saw the change on his boy's face. "Put it off a while; there's heaps of time. You shall travel. You shall go on the Continent. I'll pay 'em a thousand pound if they'll give you up."

"Be true to your honour, Tom," said Mr. Maggs. "Honour and duty are the same. You do your duty, and fear no man. There's a blessin' on it."

"Tom, my dear," Mrs. Maggs urged in her turn, "chuck her over! Chuck her over! Chuck her over!"

He looked on them each in turn, and each could see the outward evidence of the struggle within. And then he spoke, and said, "Father, you have defined them rightly. Honour is duty, and duty is honour. I will do my duty, and I will keep my honour unstained, if God help me."

"And you be sure He will," said Mr. Maggs, rubbing his eyes with his knuckles. "He never yet put a burden on any of His creeturs, but what He made their backs fit to bear it."

And after considerable experience of the ups and downs of this life, but more particularly of the *downs*, we candidly acknowledge ourselves pretty much of Mr. Maggs's opinion.

CHAPTER IV.

If Tom was under the impression that the ladies at The Cottage were not aware of his return home, he was very much mistaken. They knew the very hour he returned from Liverpool, and probably Constance took particular pains that afternoon in adorning her person, expecting he would hasten to them at once. We know their dinner hour was altered that day, and the old woman brought out from the little cupboard in the pantry, which did duty for a cellar, a whole bottle of claret, which cost exactly one shilling and threepence. She knew the lad drank claret, and on such an occasion as the present, the rules of strict economy by which she governed her establishment, might with propriety be broken through. They were in the habit of dining at one o'clock when alone. If any callers dropped in during that meal they called it luncheon. A cup of tea, however, on this day took the place of the mutton at one o'clock, and the dinner was put off until seven. Had Tom known what sacrifices were being made for him, what hunger and faintness were being suffered on his account, his heart would have been moved with pity. Mrs. Revell was an old soldier, and had

done duty in the trenches scores of times. She could fast and smile. She could bear up with all the endurance of a Spartan. And although ominous rumblings gave painful testimony to the emptiness that gnawed within her, yet not one minute before seven should the pea-soup be served. With Constance, however, the struggle was keener. She was healthy, and had on most occasions a most royal and honest appetite. Never did hours seem so long. When the clock struck five she thought it must be wrong. The hands seemed to creep slower than she had ever known them. She wished she had eaten more at luncheon. She almost regretted they had put off dinner. So she got a piece of bread from the pantry, and munched away while she made herself beautiful, and carefully replaced the tooth Mr. King had supplied her with as soon as she had finished her simple repast.

Seven o'clock came at last, but without Tom. They gave him another half hour, occupying the time by listening in silence at the drawing-room window for the sound of his horse's feet, which, alas, never came. It was mortifying. They had prepared a feast, and the hero never appeared. They had prepared oblations and sacrifices, but the god to whom the offerings were to be made absented himself from the temple. They had hungered and fasted, and would have cut themselves with knives had it been fashionable, and after all they were obliged to sit down at eight o'clock to the dismal meal with no other company than their own. Mamma could not make it out. Sure, he ought to have come! He ought, indeed, to have

written her immediately after his proposal to Constance. But even supposing that was impossible, and that the whole twenty-four hours had gone by without leaving him a single minute to pen her a line, he had quite time enough to come to them that evening. T'was only three miles from Chirkwell to The Moat; and what were three miles, or three hundred for that matter, to a man in love? His conduct was preposterous.

It must be confessed, that though Constance suffered more from her abstinence than her mamma, yet she defended him. She said they were unreasonable in expecting him to rush over the moment he returned. Very likely he was tired, or had business to talk over with his uncle. But he would be certain to come the next day, and lay his proposal before the old woman. Perhaps even he might bring Mr. Seedly with him to talk over what settlements should be made. "And mind, mamma," she observed, "don't you be a fool and hint at delay, or any such nonsense. The sooner I'm settled the better."

"Trust me for that," mamma had replied. "Long engagements are not desirable under any circumstances. In your case, my dear, it would be absolutely wicked. Strike when the iron is hot, and they can't back out. I know from considerable experience that one is never safe until the assistance of the Church has actually been given."

But the next day came, and the next, and the next, and no Tom. The third day, however, they got the paper in which was a graphic account copied from the "Liverpool Express" of the capture

of Parkes, and the death of Captain Jack. A considerable paragraph was given to Tom, which hinted that "the gallant young gentleman had been influenced by the beauty, etc., etc., of a certain young artiste who was at that moment delighting our ancient city with her rendering of the plays of the immortal bard"; and the writer finished up by assuring his readers that Englishmen are Englishmen still, and that the spirit which swayed "our ancient sires who ruled the stormy waves," was not yet extinct. But whether he intended Captain Jack, or Tom, as an illustration of that theory, he did not say.

Who can say what pangs, what heartburnings, what watchful hours, that paper brought to The Cottage? That old woman, I believe, would have gone down on her knees to the lad to beseech him not to forsake "me child," were she certain he would relent. They felt sure that he had burst the chains he had so recently fastened on himself, and had thrown himself into the arms of that creature, that acting woman. Constance almost gave up all hope. No sooner was the prize within her grasp than it was snatched from her. She hated that other woman. Had she been living in the days when one could poison an enemy without being found out, she would have poisoned her. She did not love the lad, or if she did, her love was but a very small, sickly plant, not worth mentioning. Constance had had her affair, and broken her heart, as far as ladies' hearts do usually break, years ago when the object of Tom's affections was the broken meat on Mr. Fuller's table. Ladies don't break their hearts

twice, though they may pretend to do so. They have their little romantic affairs, and their stolen meetings, and exchange letters twenty times a-day, and quarrel with *the one*, and make it up again as all lovers do, until they are found out, and mamma whips her and sends her to her room, from the window of which she sees *him* going round the corner, sheepish and crestfallen, with a flea in his ear. If ever they break their hearts, or suffer in their feelings after *that*, it is for the loss of something more substantial than billing and cooing, and pin-money goes a long way farther with them than passion. But here, she thought, were passion and pin-money, a good establishment, and the prospect of taking it out of the Misses Bogey all gone, leaving nothing but a very blank future before her. Besides that, Constance was not lost to all sense of shame and humiliation. She knew she had humbugged the lad, and gammoned him, and knelt down to him, as she had humbugged, and gammoned, and knelt down to a good many others. And when she thought of those others, and how they had seen through her artifices, or had failed to be attracted by her charms, she was humiliated, and cried until those eyes which Tom had thought so glorious, were swollen and red, and her nose as pinched and fiery as Miss Bogey's own little snub.

And so for a whole fortnight they suffered and quarrelled with each other, and smiled on those who called on them. The lies and stories those two women, but more particularly the elder lady, told on those occasions, we will not attempt to chronicle. Mamma had taken care to let everyone

know of Constance's engagement, the very day after the ball. "These affairs cannot be made public too soon," she had observed to her daughter. "Let it once be understood in society that you are engaged, and he must stand to his word." They were continually being asked when Tom would be publicly presented as Constance's future husband; where he was then; how it was they never saw him now at The Cottage, and many other questions of a similar perplexing character, to all of which they had to make answers. After two or three days of this suffering, Constance was never at home when people called, or she had a headache, or had gone out, and mamma had to sustain the attacks of these free lances alone. With a bold front, and considerable skill gained by long practice, the old soldier parried every thrust, and at length determined to assault the citadel and carry it by storm, unless the garrison capitulated. At the very moment that Mrs. Maggs was stoutly declaring that Tom "must chuck her over," a council of war was being held in Constance's bedroom. Her disappointment and humiliation were beginning to pale the roses on her cheeks, and her eyes looked dark enough, and perhaps rather too hollow, for most men's tastes. Her head ached—it often ached now, that poor old head—and she had laid in bed the greater part of the day. She was really very ill. Had a note come to The Cottage when Tom returned home, saying he was drunk and knew not what he said when he proposed to her, and backed out of it, she would probably have led the servants a devil of a life for three or four days, and made an

onslaught on the curate on the fifth, praising that gentleman's last sermon, and discussing the question as to the necessity of the baptism of infants as a means to salvation, gradually becoming convinced that that uncharitable preacher of charity was correct in his dogma, that unless the innocents, of whom the Master said, "of such is the kingdom of heaven," are sprinkled by apostolic hands, and received into the bosom of the Church by a worthy gentleman, who would go home and lose his temper and abuse the mutton, just like the present writer, or any other miserable sinner, they would be lost. It is our firm belief that Constance would have done this, and thrown over the smoking cap she was making for Tom, and begun a pair of slippers for Mr. Wheedle. But he did not come to her, and he did not send, and the uncertainty of the whole position was more trying than a defeat. And mamma smoothed Constance's forehead when she cried, and spoke kindly to the poor old girl, and then rose up, and declared with a frown and a snort that she would know the rights of it to-morrow. She would drive to The Moat; she would beard the lion—*she* did not say lion, though the word she applied to Tom might also with the greatest propriety be applied to a lion of tender years—in his den. She would let him see that her daughter's feelings and youthful affections—here poor Constance blushed faintly—were not to be trifled with and trampled on. She would bring him to his senses, and if he persisted in his heartless conduct, she would apply to her country and her country's laws, to say what pecuniary consideration would repair

the damages sustained by that leathery old heart. Full of this resolve, the old woman was just entering her carriage the next morning, when Tom, looking very pale, and anything but a happy lover or lucky dog, rode in at the gate, and dismounted at the door.

The old woman made him an elaborate curtsey. She was very glad he was come, it is true. "Better late than never," she thought. "But if these are Australian manners, thank God they arn't English, and so I'll let him know as sure as his name is what it is."

Tom held out his hand to her, but the old woman affected not to see it. She would hold her hands free from the sign of friendship, until she was certain he came in peace, and she preceded him to the drawing-room, and sat herself opposite to him in grim silence, which was the more awkward, inasmuch as he was silent too. His tongue had wagged pretty freely in that room a few days, a year, a century rather, ago. He had talked, and joked, and sang songs, breathing nothing but the most violent love there, and yet the first time he enters it in the character of the accepted suitor, he was as glum as though he was attending a funeral. The old woman had thought, when Constance had told her the little game was won, that he would have come over, and brought Constance a handsome present, and a trifle of jewellery perhaps for herself. That he would have made her a little speech, and perhaps embraced her, and she was not above being embraced by a handsome young fellow yet. She made certain that she would have to join their

hands, and had actually spent considerable thought in putting together a few choice and motherly expressions to precede the eventual "bless you, my children; may you be happy!" and she might have added with some truth, "which we have never been!" But here was Tom looking pale, and out of spirits, and anything but jovial, and the old woman glowering on him like an ogress. At last he stammers out his hope that Miss Revell, Constance, was very well.

"Constance was not well. She was very unwell. She had not yet left her room," the old woman replied, in a grim, dry manner, although, to tell the truth, that young lady had seen him come in at the gate, and had hastened upstairs to increase by those secrets known to elderly young ladies, but which we would scorn to make public, the pallor of her face and the dark colour beneath her eyes.

"I am very sorry," Tom said, looking at the carpet. "I—I've been unwell myself."

"Oh!" was mamma's only reply.

Then Tom began again. He had to go through what under any circumstances young fellows regard as an awkward task, but what was doubly so to him. Mamma seemed determined to give him no assistance, although, as a rule, mammas are very considerate in such cases, and willing to give all the assistance they can to bashful lovers. So he began: "I ought to have called on you before, Mrs. Revell—"

The old woman nodded, as though she would thus express her opinion that there was no doubt of it.

"About what occurred at the ball," he continued. "But perhaps Miss R—, Constance, has told you all about it!"

"I'd rather hear what *you* have to say, sir," mamma replies.

"Certainly," Tom said. "The fact is I—ah—believe I made a proposal to Miss— to Constance on the night of the ball."

"Of marriage?" says the old woman.

"Of marriage," Tom replies.

"Oh! very well. Go on, Mr. Seedly," mamma remarks.

"Then, having made this proposal, I now beg to inquire whether I have your consent to my being regarded as—as your, ah—" and poor Tom looked desperately round the room, waved his hand, and then proceeded to pull the lining of his hat out.

"As Constance's future husband," mamma said, completing the sentence for him.

"Yes!" he replies, with a sigh very unlike that of a happy bridegroom elect.

"What answer did Constance return you?" inquires mamma, as though this was the first she had heard of that little affair.

"Miss Revell did me the honour to—to return me an answer in the affirmative," Tom replies, miserably.

"Then if Constance said yes, I can but say yes, too," mamma says. "I never will consent to rule my child's fancies or affections. I may attempt to —to—if I may say so, to regulate them, for she is young, very young. But I would never endeavour to thwart her wishes. Mr. Seedly, you have won a

treasure—a treasure, sir, that Members of Parliament and men of the highest rank and wealth have sighed in vain for. 'Me child' might wear a coronet if she would but say the word. But a faithful heart, a happy fireside with congenial tastes, and a moderate fortune, is more to her than rank or wealth. I shall miss her sweet face and affectionate manner when she leaves *my* humble roof to adorn, and she will adorn, your ancestral halls. But I'm an old woman, or at least not old, but forty, and b—" She was going to say "bless you! bless you!" when she remembered that Constance was not present, and that she had not yet given him her opinion as to his conduct in remaining away a whole fortnight. So she continued, "but I *must* say I consider it very extraordinary that you should take a fortnight to discover that my consent was necessary to your happiness."

"Thank you! I'm excessively obliged to you!" Tom said. "I should have come before, but——"

"Pray say no more about it!" mamma replies, now softening considerably. "Your excuses you can make to me child. I will send her to you." And the old woman left the room to send Constance to the arms of her expectant lover.

I think the time Tom spent alone in that room before Constance made her appearance was a pretty severe punishment for him. There was no sound but the ticking of the little ormolu clock on the mantelpiece, and yet it made him nervous. He would have liked to have smashed that clock, and put an end to its ticking for ever. If he heard the kitchen door slam, it made him start. The rustle

of the ivy leaves outside the window caused his hands to tremble and a feeling of weakness to invade his knees. One moment he felt hot and suffocating, and the next it seemed to him that a stream of cold water was being poured down his back. Constance was not going down to him directly he came, you may be sure. That young lady knew the effect of solitary confinement, and determined he should become acquainted with it too. Besides, it has already been intimated that she was preparing herself for the *rôlé* of the invalid. And when she did open the door, it is certain she looked pale and interesting. What was it that caused Tom to turn as pale as the young lady herself? his heart to thump against his ribs as though it would burst its way out? or why should he feel as if he had appropriated the spoons, or hidden the little dagger which was purchased in Sheffield, but which mamma described as the weapon with which David Rizzis was slain, in his pocket? In fact, why does a young fellow always appear assinine in the presence of the woman he has proposed to; when he thinks he has made a mistake? Constance held the handle of the door in one hand, and pressed the other on her heart—that poor old heart that had been battered and broken so often. Her artistic efforts did her the highest credit. Her colour had been toned down to a pure transparent white. Her forehead was like marble—not a line on it. Not the suspicion of a line at the corners of her eyes—those eyes so dark, so lustrous, so swimming. There was a dark shade around them, too, which rather increased the pallor of her face. Her black

hair was arranged with consummate art, in closely woven, heavy bands, crowning her head like a tiara of ebony. And there the poor young thing stood with her hand on her corset to still the throbbing of the fond heart within, a living, though silent accusation of cruelty and neglect. Do you think Tom could see all these evidences of suffering and not be moved? Could he look on this unfortunate girl whose too susceptible heart had been won by his—well, attractions—and not feel pity for her? Pity, we all know, is akin to love. And if she was an object for his pity, sure it was the sweetest flattery to himself. It was for *him* those roses had bloomed—through him those roses had faded. If those glorious flowers of youth and beauty had thrived and blossomed in the summer of his smile, had they not withered and drooped in the winter of his neglect? And when a tear sprang to her eye, was it not for him that that tear was shed—no, not quite shed, but almost? It trembled on the eyelid, but did not run over. It would scarcely have done to let it trickle slowly down her pale cheek, and perhaps hang at the end of her nose, for salt water, even in minute particles, is highly destructive to pearl powder. But the tear was there, and Tom saw it, and felt—well, as he since assured the present writer, he did not know how he felt. She looked so beautiful, so suffering, so injured, and so innocent, that he thought himself a brute one moment, and the most unfortunate man living the next. He could be happy with the other one—so happy. And had he never seen the other he could be very happy with this one. But the other never

could be anything to him, and this one he had promised to marry. But he had determined to do what he thought his duty. He would forget Marion, if forgetfulness were possible. He would try and stifle that passion, and give himself up to the contemplation of the youth, the beauty, the innocence of Constance, and endeavour to deserve the great love she evidently bore him. And if he had made a mistake, was he the only one who had done so? Were there not hundreds of others who had married one woman while they had loved another? "Sure, weren't marriages made in heaven?" he thought. He had heard hundreds of people say so. The Misses Bogey had said they were, and so had her ladyship, their mamma. Tom had believed in that saying for some time. Afterwards, though, he thought it might be altered with more truth, if with less sentiment. "People are *mated* in heaven!" he subsequently informed his biographer in confidence, "and occasionally *married* in the other place." At any rate, he must make the best of it now, and the best thing he could do was to persuade himself he did love her, and that that other passion, that hopeless one, was but a dream. So he went to her, and took her hand. He did not do what happy lovers are expected to do. There were no embracings, no losing themselves in each other's eyes, as ardent lovers would do. All that is confined to the first little affair. Constance, as we know, had gone through it, and Tom's second had come actually before the bloom was off his first. Had he not made that journey to Liverpool, the chances are he would have sat on the sofa clasping her hand in his, and looking silently into

her eyes for hours together, as we know a certain young lady and gentleman are doing at this moment not ten minutes' walk from where we write. He would have gone on gazing into her eyes, I say, until it was time for him to go home, or if he stayed to supper, until she thought it advisable to renew the pallor of her cheeks, which would have been probably removed by certain contacts of a purely osculatory character. But he did not kiss her, nor even offer to. He took her hand in his—he might, perhaps, have gently pressed it—and inquired how she was.

"She was not well. She had been ill," she murmured. "How could she be well after his—his—heart—heartless conduct." And she shot a glance at him from those eyes of hers which used to do such execution in the *old* time, which was but a few days ago, and then shaded them with her handkerchief in which was a small hole through which she could watch him, while the lace on her bosom rose and fell with sighs. But that little game was played out. He was almost proof against her eyes, though not against her tears. Few men are proof against a woman's tears; I candidly confess I am not. I hope the time is far distant when I shall arrive at that stage of stoicism. It was but a few days ago an old harridan who had robbed my hen-roost, purloined the sugar, and embezzled the coals, to say nothing of several articles of juvenile adornment, begged me to forgive her. I refused; I called for a policeman. Then she wept, and I let her go, and gave her sixpence. But to what extent the tears of a young and beautiful woman might move me, I

do not know. Had that old beldame been young and pretty, I might have made that sixpence a half-crown; I might have been tempted — of course I should not have given way to that temptation, having a wife and children already—to wipe her tears away. Oh, woman! woman! be sure your strength is in your weakness.

And so Constance had a dry fit of weeping. She sobbed and heaved her shoulders, but kept back her tears for reasons already mentioned. And Tom began to comfort her. He did not tell her of his visit to Liverpool, nor anything that occurred during that brief visit. And you may be certain she did not refer to it. She had no desire to quarrel with the lad, nor any intention of becoming jealous, or at least, showing any sign of jealousy. If he had erred, would not her silence on the subject be a greater reproach than any words could have been? Would it not be better to bury his offence, and forget it for ever—or at least until they were married? If mamma was an old campaigner, Constance had some knowledge of the human heart, too. In one thing she even showed more diplomacy than the old woman. Mamma was for pitching into him, and making him sensible that he had grievously offended. She would have had Constance upbraid him with tears and stormy words; she would have known all about his visit, and that acting woman, and, in fact, would probably have made the lad go back from his word, or postpone the consummation of their wishes indefinitely, even if he did not "chuck her over." Constance, however, was quite wise enough to know that in doing

this, she would be throwing the game away. If he strained at his fetters, she was not going to make them eat into his flesh, and fester, and drive him desperate, until, in his agony, he should burst his bonds and cast them from him. If the iron was irksome and galled him, she would pad them, and cover the bare iron with silk, and gild them over, and make them sit easily on him. If she had shorn his locks and deprived him of his strength, she would not jeer at his weakness, nor taunt him respecting his bald pate, for angry lovers' locks grow rapidly. No. She would soothe him, would show him she placed every confidence in him. And in this she showed her knowledge of generous youth. He could not but be sensible of this confidence. He could not betray it; he would respect it, and she would hold him in double bonds. How the lad blamed himself when he saw this! "Here," he thought, "I have won her young and pure affections; I have deliberately set myself out to steal her heart, and now I have won it, I am tired of it, and anxious to cast it away. It was base, it was cruel." But he would try and make amends. She, poor thing, should never suspect his heart had turned traitor, had thrown off its allegiance, and was madly beating to be laid at the feet of another princess who had usurped her throne. He would tell her all, he would ask her pardon, he would—but no, why wound her? Why let her know what would cause her pain? Better let her rest in her ignorance, for she loved him and believed in him. And so he led her to the sofa, and sat down beside her, and though there were no rapturous hand-pressings, no

passionate kisses, no vows, there were no quarrels, no bickerings, no recriminations. He told her that he had spoken to her mother, and had gained her consent to their union. A fortnight ago he would have pressed for an early day, which probably she would have consented to name. A month—a week, would have been an eternity to wait. But now he never once referred to it. It would have to take place some time, it is true — but there was no hurry. Twelve months would not be a long engagement. He would willingly wait twelve months, or twelve years for that matter. But then there was another person whose wishes were to be consulted. Ladies, as a rule, make a pretence of objecting to an early day. Had Tom pressed Constance to say next month or next week, she would have objected, as a matter of course, and finally have said he might please himself. But in this case the lover was not ardent. He never once hinted that he should be miserable, until blest, &c. &c. This was an instance in which the usual rule might be departed from with advantage. She could not very well ask him to name the auspicious day, but she could give him to understand that she would like him to ask *her* to do so. So as the twilight threw its soft shadows over the room, she gave herself up to the witchery of the hour, and laid her head in gentle confidence on his shoulder. "She would be so happy now," she informed him. "So happy when they were one; when he would always soothe her brow; when hers would be the task of cheering him, of rejoicing in his joy, of sharing his troubles, his griefs, his happinesses. That were a lot too blessed. And oh!

when that hour came, he would find a haven from the storms of life in the safe harbour of her love." What could the lad do when this was murmured in his ear in gentle accents? What could he do or say but what he did and said? He wasn't made of marble, and as far as women were concerned, he wasn't sharper than you or I, and could not tell humbug from real, genuine passion. And so he kissed her, and said with a gulp, "he would speak to his uncle." And then he went out and mounted his horse and galloped furiously home, with misery, and self-contempt, and wild passionate longing for that other love in his heart, and wished he was dead.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Revell had a mortal antipathy to long engagements. What was worth doing at all, was worth doing quickly. Mr. Seedly proposed in his conference with her, that as Constance and Tom were both young, they might easily wait a year or two. The little man was anxious to gain time. Twelve months might bring a reprieve for his boy. Lots of things might happen in the space of a year. He would invite all the good-looking fellows, and all the rich fellows he knew to stop at The Moat, and introduce everyone of them to the ladies at the cottage. He would praise her to them as the most charming young lady in the world, and if one of them should cut Tom out, "why Gad, you know, he would be very welcome. No one there should stand in his way. On the contrary, they would resign their claim with all the pleasure in life." He did not say all this to Mrs. Revell, but he thought it. He merely mentioned to her, that were they to wait a year or so, he did not think anyone would be the worse off for it. But mamma objected to any waiting at all. She did not take the little man's hints, but gave him to understand that all that was necessary to be done, was to agree to what settlements should

be made, and then engage the parson at once. Mr. Seedly endeavoured to explain to her that there could be no hurry, but the old woman was dull. She would not see what he was driving at. She did even more than ignore his suggestions. She fastened hers on him, and treated them as if he had made them. She told him that she was quite of his opinion, that nothing stood in the way of an immediate union of the young people. Constance is very young, she assured him; but it was news to her, if youth was any objection in a wife. They would enjoy the full spring of their lives in each other's love, and the only thing to consider was how the young people should live.

"Of course" she said "we know that Thomas will be your heir. I think I have heard him mention that beyond what you choose to give him he had nothing. Now, Mr. Seedly, I needn't say to you that they cannot live on nothing. What do you propose to do for them, then? Do you think they should have a separate establishment, or will there be room for them at The Moat?"

"No, Tom has nothing beyond what I shall allow him!" Mr. Seedly replied. "And—I might marry myself someday," he added as a sudden idea occurred to him. "I dont see why I should not, Mrs. Revell. I see many fellows older than I am marry."

The old woman, however, was not to be taken in after that fashion. She had heard Tom say that his uncle had suffered a disappointment in early life, and that he never would marry. Indeed, did she not know several ladies, and Constance among the

number, who had besieged that fortress without success? and she made a mental observation that he might tell that to the marines, affecting, however at the same time to recognise the possibility of what he alluded to.

"Certainly!" she replied, "I don't see why you should not. Because a man is an *old* man, I don't see why he should make a worse husband than a younger one. But pardon me, my dear Mr. Seedly, if I recur to the question of Thomas's settlement. I believe these affairs are usually confided to the family solicitors. I know when I was engaged to marry poor dear Revell, our family solicitor, who had been our legal adviser for generations, you know, did everything. But some allowance must be made for a mother's feelings. My dear Constance is my only treasure, and—and—ah! what do you purpose doing, dear Mr. Seedly?"

"I should like to know what Miss Constance's fortune is!" the little man replied, rattling a handful of silver and a bunch of keys in his pocket. "I think I've heard something or other about ten thousand pound."

"Of course!" the old woman said; "quite natural I'm sure. I can't tell to a pound or so, Mr. Seedly, but it will be about that sum, *more or less*. I'll give them a thousand down the day they are married, to begin housekeeping on, and to pay the expenses of their honeymoon. Strictly settled on my child, of course, and in case anything should happen to her, and she should leave this world for a more blessed abode than The Moat, though she might go farther and fare worse, it would revert to her family. You

can't object to such very liberal proposals, I'm sure."

"A thousand pound, ain't much!" the little man replied. "And how the deuce they are to pay their honeymoon expenses out of it, if it is settled on Constance, I can't imagine. As to its reverting to your family in case of her decease, that won't do, you know. There might be children, and they should inherit."

"In that case, Thomas and yourself, dear Mr. Seedly, would naturally provide for them!" said the old woman.

"I think, after all, our solicitors had better arrange everything!" the little man observed.

"Ah! there you go. You men are so hot-tempered," the old woman replied. "Suppose I concede that the money should go to the children."

"And if there are no children, to Tom," interrupted the little man.

"Now you are unreasonable!" mamma says.

"Not at all," the little man replied. "If you object to that, Tom's widow, should he die first, shall have nothing but her own money."

"Well, well! have it your own way!" the old woman sighed.

"But then, what about the rest of her fortune!" Mr. Seedly inquired. "There's nine thousand more or less to come to her, I understood you to say?"

"That will be after my death. When I depart, all I have will go to my child!" mamma replied, waving her hand, as though to express to her visitor what immense wealth that *all* would be. "And now what do *you* intend doing?"

"Under the circumstances you mention, I will settle on Tom The Moat and the farm. Should he die, the issue of the marriage to succeed, his widow having an annuity out of the estate of three hundred a year as long as she lives, and remains unmarried. In case there is no issue of the marriage, and Tom survives, the trust shall cease, and he will become proprietor wholly and solely. I will also allow them five hundred a year for personal expenses, and they can live at The Moat. I shan't be much in their way. A couple of rooms and a knife and fork will be all I shall want. And perhaps I shall travel most of my time."

"Then the only question remaining to be settled, said the old woman, "is when it shall be. Of course they are naturally anxious to have it over as soon as possible. I can quite imagine dear Thomas's impatience. I know poor dear Revell could with difficulty be got to allow me a month to prepare for the interesting event. It is September now. What do you say to the middle of December. Three months of course will seem an age to them, but I think they may wait until then!"

"But my dear Madam,"—the little man commenced, horrified at his boy being pitchforked into matrimony in this way.

"Now, I know what you are going to say," the old woman interrupted, waving her fan. "You are going to plead for an earlier day. But really, I think December will do very well. Of course, if you particularly wish it, we might be induced to name a month or two earlier."

"By no means! pray don't mention it," gasped the little man.

"Then we may consider everything settled," said the old woman. "Perhaps you will instruct your solicitor as soon as possible. And now we will rejoin the young folks, though I daresay they would just as soon have our room as our company."

And so Mrs. Revell arranged for the marriage of the child and Tom. He had but three months more of freedom—no, not exactly of freedom, for he wore his bonds and felt them. And he tried all he could to forget Marion, and to fan the legitimate spark into a flame. It burned fiercely enough some little time ago, but now it had gone out, and all the blowing and nursing in the world would never reanimate *that* fire. It was dead, and the hearthstone was cold. And yet those two were going to sit by that cold hearth, on which the immortal fires of love would never burn, for ever and ever, until death or Sir James Hannen did them part. He could not have much of Constance's company now, as everyone at the Cottage were busy in preparing her trousseau. Perhaps it was better he had not. Mamma was determined that "me child" should leave her home with everything befitting the daughter of a Revell. The milliners had instructions to provide her with everything of the latest fashion, and of the most costly nature. Other tradesmen had similar orders, and as they knew Constance was to marry a wealthy man, the orders were duly executed. Had Miss Revell not been about to be married, it is possible those tradesmen would have thought twice before giving unlimited credit. "My daughter is marrying Mr.

Seedly, nephew of Mr. Seedly of The Moat, who is so wealthy," she informed them. "You will put everything to my daughter's account, and you can send in your bill at the usual time." Everything was put to her daughter's account, including a couple of silk costumes, and a few other trifles for herself, and before those accounts were sent in, the heading in the ledgers was altered from "Miss Revell, Dr. to so and so," to Mrs. Thomas B. Seedly, Dr. &c., &c. Vast quantities of linen and hosiery poured in on them. Attenuated silk umbrellas mounted in gold, scent bottles, and a hundred other nick-nacks also mounted in the precious metal. Most of these things were in duplicate, and had to be paid for, so that it is possible mamma feathered her own nest while she was feathering her daughter's. It is true Constance wondered at mamma's generosity. Before this time, had she wanted a new dress, there was generally a fight for it. But now she was being inundated with costly clothes. Constance was like many other young ladies, fond of finery. Indeed, the tendency to adorn themselves in purple and fine linen is not confined to the youthful. Ladies, who must have been contemporaries of our grandmammas are fond of feathers, and silks, and satins, and bedizen their rickety, worn-out old bodies, like any young miss in her teens. It was astonishing. Mamma's goodness and generosity were wonderful. And she kissed the old woman, and thanked her. Mamma knew what was due to her daughter. She would spare no expense. Everything should be of the best, and Constance thought that everything would be paid for before she became Mrs. Seedly.

The old woman insisted on Constance's maiden name being marked on all her linen, and engraved on the gold mountings of her umbrella and scent bottles, notwithstanding the younger lady thought it somewhat stupid. "No!" mamma said, "she would take her outfit from her mother's roof, and everything should bear her maiden initials, or everyone will imagine your husband gave them to you!" And so C. R. appeared on all Constance's finery, while Dr. stood opposite the lists of them elsewhere.

In the meantime, Tom smoked harder than ever, and did not improve in his looks, or regain the fine healthy colour which he had lost. He was but two-and-twenty, but he looked ten years older. The gay, jovial laugh, the sparkle of the eye, the hearty manner had left him; and when he went to Manchester, and called on his old friends in Hulme Terrace, he appeared to them almost a middle-aged man. Mr. Maggs was more respectful than ever his wife had known him to be to any living person. He knew the lad had placed duty over desire, and that the struggle had, and would continue, to cost him much suffering. Tom was a hero to Mr. Maggs, while his wife regarded him as a martyr. She would have "chucked her over" at the last minute. She did not believe in breaking hearts after that fashion. "If they are bruk at all," she informed her husband, "it's arter the wedding. They will have to smile, and their healths will be drunk at the wedding breakfast," she said; "But how much smiling will there be arterwards? It's when they are alone, Samwel, they'll catch it. Fancy our pore dear Tom having a young woman

sitting opposite him all his life as he don't care tuppence about, while the one as ought to pour out his tea for him, is apining herself away. It's horrid. It's again' nature. It's again' reason. It's again' religion. There never can, and never will be, a blessin' on it." It is wonderful how little sympathy there is between women on such matters. If a fellow quarrels with his wife, her lady friends set it down as *her* fault. If the man takes to drink, she has driven him to it. And if she makes a slip, even of the most trivial nature, from the paths of rectitude, there are no accusers, no judges, so bitter, so severe, as her fellow sisters. Mrs. Maggs hated Constance. "Would she come to the wedding?" "No, thank you!" she replied with a snort. "I never was fond of a slaughterhouse, and I don't know as I should find the offering up of a innocent lamb at all entertaining. Thank you, Tom, you'll excuse me. And I'll stop home, and hope for the best, please God."

"Would Mr. Maggs come? Indeed, he must come," Tom said.

"Yes," Mr. Maggs replied, "he would come." Tom was like a son to him, and he would see the job finished. He wasn't going to turn his back on a friend when he wanted a friend. He would stand by him, and see him through it. "And you only do your dooty, and you'll pull through this 'ere storm yet!" he informed Tom.

This was the first week in December. In another fortnight all would be over. He must ask Sam to be best man, and he must tell Marion of his coming marriage. She was sure to have heard it already

from Sam. But he must tell her. God help him, poor lad. He would rather have faced a battery of Prussian artillery. He would a thousand times rather throw his arms aloft, look once more at the light of day, and go down in the pitiless sea. This was not a very comfortable frame of mind in which to stand up in God's house, and swear to love, honour, and cherish a woman for whom he had no love. He did not consider what would come after, had he sought escape by death. He simply regarded the end of all things as rest—total oblivion. A miserable faith, and one which, in time, he renounced. Who shall say, though, what that future will be? We are taught to believe in a spiritual heaven! and yet the best men and women the present writer ever met believed in a material heaven. By best, he does not mean those who attend Divine Service the most regularly, nor those who read the responses in Church the loudest. He means men and women who thought no ill, spoke no ill of their fellows; who led pure lives, placing implicit reliance in *His* mercy. They believed that they should see their beloved ones in the *flesh*, and that they would know and be known by them. Mr. Seedly believed he should see his love in that other world, and would be welcomed by her. Tom only looked on it as a release from present misery. How he dreaded that interview; how he wished it was over. But he had to face it, and bear the pain, and see *her* bear the pain as best she might; and not only that, but to hide his own trouble, and not to let her see he knew of hers.

He went up to London to see Sam and Marion,

They were now engaged at the Adelphi, and had taken a foremost place among the greatest actors and actresses of the day. They had made their *début* together in "Romeo and Juliet." Such a success had never been remembered by the oldest play-goer. They were called before the curtain at least a dozen times, and now Mr. Seymour Beaufort and Miss Zulmann were delighting the whole world. Though Mr. Seymour Beaufort was a great man in the eyes of the public, with Tom he was still Sam Maggs. Sam was delighted to be asked to do duty as the groomsman. He immediately rehearsed a little speech he should make at the breakfast when he should propose the bridemaids' healths, and informed Tom he would set about an ode to Love that very night. And he wished him all the happiness in the world, and that his quiver might be full of arrows.

"Love! happiness!" shouted the happy groom elect so wildly that he startled his friend. "Oh! to be sure we shall be happy. And there's lots of love! heaps of it, old fellow. Love! happiness! ha! ha! Why, Sam, you old fool, do you think there is such a thing in the world as happiness? Poor old Sam! credulous old Sam! When you hear a fellow say he's happy, or that even there is such a thing as happiness, call him a liar, and I'll prove it."

"Here! I say, old chap," Sam replied, though he was very much frightened at the other's words and wild manner, "this won't do, you know. You've been having your fling, I expect, before settling down into steady matrimony. You ought to have taken me with you, to keep you all right. You've gone

and done it, old man, and S. and B. is the thing *you* want."

"Ah! let's have the S. and B. then, Sam!" the poor boy sighed. "Then you'll see me made happy, Sam! You'll help to tie the knot that is to be blessed."

"All right," said Sam. "Now we'll have some strong tea, and a pipe after. Capital thing, strong tea, especially if you've been a bit elewated, as my old governor would say."

And so Sam got his landlady to brew Tom some strong tea, and drowned him almost in soda-water afterwards. He thought the lad had been drinking. "Never saw such a feller," he thought. "He doesn't carry his liquor with discretion. I fancy he gets nasty when a bit sprung." And so he *had* been drinking, but not from the stream Sam thought.

The next morning Tom made his call in Northumberland Street. Marion had taken her old lodgings again, only this time she had two rooms entirely to herself, and did not dine with the family. Little Tom Piper, who opened the door to him, rushed downstairs into the kitchen and told his mother that the tall, big gentleman, who took tea with them one evening when he had called on Miss Zulmann, was upstairs. "And he looks very white, and not at all so handsome as he did," little innocent added. Marion was at home, and once more he stood in that little room. It was not so very many months ago, and yet it seemed to him a century. A gulf now separated those two, a gulf impassable but by death. What a glorious creature that girl was! Her beauty was something marvellous. One can understand

ardent, passionate men, ay, and cool-headed patriarchs, perilling life and soul for such women. Marion was a woman, and not a beautiful statue. She had her failings as well as other women, and her weaknesses, and her love, and her misery. But the girl was a heroine. She had all Tom's pluck, and fifty times his nerve. She knew very well what he had to say to her. She knew that moment when he had looked into her eyes, away there on the landing-stage at Liverpool, that he loved her. And how dear he was to her, her heart had told her years ago. And now he was come to tell her that all her hopes were but Dead Sea fruit; that her love and his love were a curse instead of a blessing; that they must never meet again, must forget each other. Heavens! what a bound, and a throb, and a sudden stop of that poor little heart. All the warm blood froze in her veins for one moment, and then rushed tumultuously up her neck, her throat, her head, and dazed her brain, then back again, leaving her as white as the linen collar round her shapely throat. And yet she came to him smiling, as only a lovely woman who has come out of the furnace pure and saintly, or as an angel in heaven, can smile. She would not pain him by ignoring his engagement to that other woman. He must speak out presently, though he is standing stunned and lost in the purity of her presence. She would enter on the subject at once. "My dear Tom!" she said, in a low sweet voice, "I know what you are come about. You are come to tell me of your marriage, which is so near. You see I know all about it. Sit down, Tom. Not there, sit here by me; it will probably be the last time, you know."

"Yes," he replied, "I am come to tell you; but you don't congratulate me. You don't wish me happiness, like Sam did. Poor old Sam! he is going to compose an ode to Love!"

"I do wish you happiness," she said, with her hand pressed tightly over her heart. "You know I wish you happiness, and that I shall pray for you, and for—her!"

"Ah! you are an angel!" he cried, covering his face with his hands. "But happiness!—There, I'm talking folly again. Sam thought last night I had been drinking. I daresay I seem like it now. Let me see! what was it I was going to ask you? Oh! I remember. I suppose you will not come to my——" He could not say wedding. The words stuck in his throat.

"No! no! Tom!" she replied. "That is asking of me more than I can bear."

He raised his head from his hands and looked at her. There was such agony, such resignation there, that he lost his reason in a whirlwind of passion. In a moment he was on his knees to her, pouring out in a hot torrent his love, and pleading with such words and looks that would have melted a heart of stone. For one moment she seemed to taste of the full cup of happiness. The next, she covered her ears with her hands. She started back from him, and her face expressed the terrible agony she was suffering. "No! no! I will not hear you," she cried, imploringly. "Tom, for pity's sake rise up and recollect yourself. Don't! don't! I won't hear you! You are almost a married man. Stop! stop! stop! or I shall die."

He rose up sobered and humbled. "You are ever good and noble, dear," he said. "I called you just now an angel. You are more than an angel—you are a pure woman. You will let me kiss you, dear! It is but once. You remember years ago I kissed you, and said I would be your brother! Let me, again, but this once, and then I'll go."

He took her in his arms, and pressed his lips respectfully on her forehead. She was quiet enough now. He then laid her gently on the sofa, and went downstairs, and told Mrs. Piper that Miss Zulmann was not well, and that she had better go up to her. That good soul found her lodger lying dead faint. She gave a pretty good guess what was the matter with her. All the time she was bathing her head, when she had regained consciousness, Marion was moaning "Oh, my darling! my darling!"

And Tom went back home. And the guests were invited. And Sam and Mr. Maggs came to attend Tom on the last morning of his bachelorhood, Mrs. Maggs firmly declining to accompany them, but calling out even at the last minute to "chuck her over," for there wasn't a blessing in it. And they appeared before God's altar, and perjured themselves, each promising what they could not perform, as thousands of others have done and will do, as long as the golden calf which we have set up is worshipped and glorified. And in the name of the Holy Trinity Mr. Prinsep declared them man and wife. And he also read from the service, "*Lo! thus shall a man be blessed that feareth the Lord.*" And Mr. Wheedle said Amen. And Mrs. Revell said Amen. And so did Sam and

the Bogey girls, and everyone present who had been invited to witness this SACRAMENT.

And they left the church husband and wife. The wife—the young bride—beautiful in her clouds of muslin and her orange flowers; and the happy husband exceedingly bilious. And they all went off to the Cottage, where Sam made a beautiful speech, and spouted some of his own poetry, and Mr. Bogey got tipsy. And when the old sexton returned to lock up the church—for he, too, had rushed off to the Cottage, in the hopes of following Mr. Bogey's example and becoming tipsy in the kitchen—he found a closely veiled though evidently young and beautiful lady kneeling in front of the altar, with her head on the altar rail, weeping her heart out; thus proving to a certain extent Mr. Maggs's proposition, that all hearts had their burdens. And there for the present we will leave her. And the present writer humbly submits that he could not leave her at a better place than at the feet of Him who said, "Come unto Me all ye that are heavy laden."

CHAPTER VI.

So the happy bride and bridegroom went on their wedding tour, to enjoy the first sweets of married life in the honeymoon. I don't think Mrs. Revell was supremely happy at this time. It is true she had managed to get her daughter settled in life, which had been for many years her great object and ambition. But there were those bills which would some time or other have to be paid. Her old carriage was to be seen almost every day moving about the country, when she went to make calls on her acquaintances, and talk of "me child, who was so happily married, you know—quite a romantic love match, and all that," of which it is true most people had their own private opinions. But while she was showing her silk costumes and parading her gold-mounted umbrella, was she not thinking of the storm that was coming when the bills for these articles would be presented to Tom's wife?

In the meantime Tom took his wife to Paris, and endeavoured to show some interest in life. They went to the theatres and all the places of public amusement with which that gay city abounds. Constance, it is true, liked it. She would not have objected to reside in Paris altogether. There were

the fashions and all those things so interesting to the female mind, and there was no mamma. But her husband was moody and not good company. He went everywhere with her, it is true, and spent his money for her gratification as lavishly as the most ardent lover could have done. It is even possible that he was more lavish in this respect than he would have been had he been deeply in love with his wife, for he knew he was but poor company, and endeavoured to cover that defect by gratifying all her fancies. But he showed no interest in what she was interested in. He went about in the most listless manner, and when they returned to their hotel, instead of giving himself up to those little endearments which young husbands usually give themselves up to, he could not have been more quiet or steady had they been man and wife for twenty years. At times, it is true, he would suddenly wake up from this listlessness, and make a frantic effort at gaiety. But these attempts were but lamentable failures, and Constance became certain of what she had suspected, that though she had a husband she had no lover. She must have known what it would have been before she married the lad. Indeed, she had often given it as her opinion that a comfortable establishment, and plenty of money to dress on, was all a woman wanted to be happy. Besides this, she had already had her grand passion, and, before her marriage, had a man wealthier than Tom offered himself to her, she would without a pang have thrown the lad over. But now she became dissatisfied at his coldness. She could find no other fault with him, for he was kind to her, gave her

everything she fancied, attended her everywhere, and to the outward eye was a model husband. But because he did not simulate that passion which neither of them felt, she was aggrieved. From what the present writer has been able to gather from Tom, he believes there was very little honey in that honeymoon. The king and queen bees had set up their hive, but where were the glorious flowers from which the honey was to be gathered? Can the sweet nectar be distilled from artificial flowers? It is believed that Constance did her best at this time to wean her husband from his melancholy. She sang to him, and caressed him, and notwithstanding all she had said to the contrary, she would have been happier had he been as he was before the night of the ball. He took her caresses, and looked at her out of his grey eyes so sad, so wistful, that her poor old heart felt as if a hand of ice had been laid on it, and shrank back into its shell, there to remain cold and half dead until, perhaps, in His good time another life should be given her. And so they grew tired of Paris, and moved on to Italy. But wherever they went, however strange the scenes or bright the skies, the sun shone not for them. They carried an eternal winter in their hearts, and when they returned to London, Constance felt that something beyond an establishment and an almost unlimited command of pocket money was necessary to happiness. On the morning after their arrival, Constance sat looking over the columns of the morning paper, reading the advertisements. Presently she looked up at her husband, and said, "Tom, I see your friends are to act to-night at the

Adelphi. The play is 'Romeo and Juliet.' Shall we go?" She wanted to see this woman whom her husband loved, to stare at her, to wither her, and scorch her with her eyes. She would see what her beauty was like. She would see how her husband bore it—would watch him as a surgeon would a patient under the knife. And if this woman loved him, what a revenge it would be for *her!* She would sit beside him, and tell her with her eyes that she had lost him whose heart she had stolen. If that woman had a heart, she would wound it to the quick, and the agony she would make her feel would be the sweetest pleasure to her. Did she think of the agony she would cause her husband? Did she reckon the danger of throwing him in the way of the woman he loved? Not one thought. She only looked forward to being revenged on Marion. And how did Tom take it? His wife, though she dropped her eyes on the paper directly she had asked the question, saw the pallor of his face, and that look of agony so well known to operators on the heart, as well as to those whose operations are confined to other parts of the body. At first he thought nothing should ever tempt him to undergo that trial. He would shun her, and never, never look on her dear face again. And then he thought there could be no harm in looking on her but once more! He would not be seen by her—she should never know he was near her. Yes, he would see her once more—but once, and then go out into the darkness and the night, which were to last for ever and ever. So he turned his face to the window, and said to his wife, "If you wish it, Constance, of course we will go!"

Constance did wish it. She had heard so much of Mr. Beaufort's acting, and of that—that other person. Was she so beautiful as people said?"—and the words came slowly and harshly from her lips while she looked the lad straight in the face. "Was she so clever? Were not actresses and people of that description rather," etc. etc.

Tom had no wish to quarrel with his wife. He thought he was wronging her sufficiently already by not loving her. He was still under the impression that she was devotedly attached to him, and yet he was wounding that poor heart every minute of the day. If he could not return her love, he would never give her an unkind word. He would be gentle with her, and forbearing, for had she not as great a burden to bear as he himself? He made no answer to her question as to the morality of the stage; had he done so, perhaps there would have been a scene, and bitter words would have been spoken that would sink into their hearts, and rankle and fester for ever and ever. So he rose up and took his hat, and said he would go and engage a box at the theatre. And then he went and wandered in the parks until nightfall, when he returned, cold, feverish, and miserable. Constance had remained in the whole day. She had no heart to go out, and moreover she was thinking of her wrongs. And presently they were in their box at the Adelphi, and Tom hid himself behind the curtains. Though he would see her, she should not see him. And Constance sat with her eyes fixed on Marion, never heeding, never hearing any of the others. And she was deadly pale, for she could but acknowledge the

marvellous beauty of the woman whom her husband loved. And Marion knew *he* was there; she felt his presence. The play was "Romeo and Juliet," in which, with Sam, she had created such a sensation in London. In the third scene of the fourth act, her acting came to an end for that night at least. She saw Constance, and felt that her eyes were searching her heart. She knew that Tom was hiding his face behind that curtain, though she never once looked that way. She felt that to stand there and go through her part was more than she could bear. And when she said—

"Farewell! God knows when we shall meet again"—

she quietly dropped on the stage dead faint. Tom, leaving his wife in the box, slipped round to the green-room and sent in his card to Mr. Beaufort, just as the manager was apologising to the house for Miss Zulmann's sudden illness. He beseeched their forbearance, and though he was afraid Miss Zulmann would be unable to appear again that night, he would place a highly amusing farce upon the boards at once, and would endeavour to deserve their kindness, etc. etc. And when, in answer to their calls, Marion was led before the curtain pale and trembling, the house rose to its feet, and came down with such a burst of applause as had rarely been heard there. Tom would not enter the green-room with Sam. He merely wished to know how Marion was, and on being told she was better, he returned to his box to find a good-looking, middle-aged gentleman in conversation with his wife. She introduced him with something like a blush. "This

is Mr. Painter, the member for Steelhampton, whom I—I used to know!" she said, and she might have added that he had been her old lover, the object of *her* grand passion ever so many years ago, when she was young, and fresh, and hopeful, and a believer in love and lovers' vows, and he was a young fellow struggling to establish a business with little or no capital but his brains and capacity for work. But all that had gone by, and though *he* was still a bachelor, she was married. That passion mamma had ruthlessly trampled on and strangled, and Constance had had to bury it, and never let it see the light again. But here was its ghost. Mr. Painter talked very pleasantly to Tom, and inquired where he was stopping, and said he should call on them the next day. But when his neat little brougham called at the hotel where they had put up, Tom and his wife were tearing along in the express train homewards. Home! What a volume of love and happiness that word conveys to young people who are mated as well as married. We know of a certain young couple who could hardly be induced to remain away the whole moon from the little cottage in which they were to rear their altar. They panted and longed to get home to that poor little place as ardently as if it had been a castellated mansion. They had purchased out of their slenderly-furnished purse a quantity of old numbers of the *Graphic*, with the illustrations of which they were to cover the walls of a certain little room, which, in the fulness of time, they fondly trusted would be occupied. There were hundreds of things for fond hands to do about that cottage, and the

temple in which they were to officiate as high priest and priestess was an object of the greatest pride and solicitude to them. But poor Tom! and poor Constance! what did the word *home* mean to them? Did it bring visions of love, and mutually supported struggles, and mutually won victories, and enjoyed happinesses? Did they go home to plant *their* garden with roses and lilies, and glorious flowers, and cover *their* walls with pictures in anticipation of that coming pleasure? Ah me! their garden was overgrown with weeds, their roses dead, their flowers unwatered, their walls bare and cold. No future looked brightly on them. There were no mutually borne struggles with the world, and no mutually shared happinesses. But they found in their home two cupboards awaiting them, and in each cupboard the skeleton of their true loves which they had strangled and put out of sight, as unfortunate women strangle and put out of sight the unwelcome fruits of their sin. And in the still hours of the night they saw those skeletons grinning at them, and the ghosts of their murdered loves mocking them, and heard them bid them, in mocking words, "be happy." And I have no doubt but in that bed consecrated to love they turned their backs on each other, and buried their faces on the pillow, and cried in the bitterness of their hearts, "How long, O Lord! how long?"

What hypocrisies and lies people in this position have to practise! How they have to dissemble, and grin, and devour their hearts in silence! When they returned home to The Moat there were triumphal arches, bearing inscriptions of "God bless the happy

pair!" "Welcome home!" "May they be happy!" and a host of other mottoes relating to love and happiness. And then their friends and neighbours called to congratulate them, and they had to put on a semblance of that happiness which never could be theirs, and call each other "dear." I think that was the hardest time of all. They wondered whether the people who came to them, and spoke to them as though they were the most loving and affectionate couple in the world, guessed the unspeakable misery that was consuming them! If they did, they said nothing; or if they spoke of it at all, it was when the principal actors in this little domestic tragedy were not present. It is quite possible they did, for Society is a great humbug, and affects not to see what it would be unpleasant to witness. I daresay mamma was under the impression that Constance would be content with her lot, if not happy. That old woman, you may be sure, made her appearance at The Moat as soon as they had returned. She kissed her daughter, and would have embraced Tom had he allowed her, and altogether received them with a great show of tenderness. She would now be able to use her daughter's carriage, thereby saving the expense of keeping her own old broken-down screw and her coachman, and perhaps borrow money of her son-in-law. "Tom was charming," she declared. "He was quite a model husband, and so *distangey*." Mamma was fond of using French words occasionally, though the less we say of her knowledge of that tongue the better. He was everything a mother-in-law could desire. Sure, Constance ought to be happy, and she never could

thank her mamma enough for securing such advantages for her. The old woman never once thought her daughter required anything but what her marriage provided her with. Had not the drawing-room been refurnished, and a grand piano purchased? Had she not a maid to do nothing but wait on her; and was not her young husband most generous in money matters? She never dreamed of that poor old heart of Constance's yearning for something higher and nobler. That affair which occurred ever so many years ago was but a childish fancy. She herself—well, she might have felt something like a passion when she was very young, but that was so long ago, and the embers of that fire had been dead for such an age, that she forgot it altogether. If you cannot put old heads on young shoulders, it is frequently quite as difficult to place young hearts in old bosoms. If youth has its foibles, and impulses, and blunderings, and weaknesses, sure age has its selfishness and blindness. And mamma was both selfish and blind. She judged everyone's heart by the measure of her own little twopenny affair. She would have been happy with all the accessories to happiness which Constance had about her. She would have been happy, even if the bridegroom were as old as herself. She would have married Tom, or Mr. Seedly, or the father of lies, who we all know is so handsome and insinuating, if the establishment were satisfactory. And so she congratulated her daughter, and was somewhat shocked at being turned upon with more than that young lady's usual amount of causticity. "You think one wants nothing but a carriage and an

extensive and well-stocked wardrobe to be happy!" she said. "I'm of a different opinion. There are such things as hearts, mamma, though I daresay you were not aware of it."

"Hearts! of course there are hearts!" mamma replied. "You set your heart on this match, and you have your heart's desire. But if you mean you are in love with your husband, I think you're a fool, Constance. You know you have given me to understand scores of times you'd just as soon marry another man as him, if everything else were satisfactory, and a very sensible remark I thought it. If you are disappointed that he is not as much in love with *you* as he was at one time, why we all find *that* out sooner or later, and you were aware of it before you married him. And suppose he isn't! Good gracious me, are you worse off than you were before? Suppose he doesn't hang about you like a lapdog, and talk nonsense all day, are you going to break your heart for that? Haven't you everything you wished for? And if he is not so—so spooney"—she continued, using that elegant word because she could think of no other—"haven't you less cause to study him, and consequently more time to give to your own gratifications. I tell you what, Constance, you want your mother by you again, to point out the blessings an all-wise Providence has, through my humble instrumentality, showered down on you, and to teach you how to use those blessings, and make the most of them. Now there's the little room upstairs looking out over the drawing-room would suit me capitally as a bedroom, and the adjoining one fitted up as a boudoir, which could be

done at a trifling expense, and I could come and live with you. And I'm sure it's what I would do for nothing else in the world but your happiness. Yes," continued mamma, waving her handkerchief to give a semblance of feeling to her words, "your happiness, my child, of course is everything to me. I cannot bear to see you dejected, and I know you want only my company to stir you up, and enable you to appreciate the blessings and advantages that surround you. Just say the word, and I'll let the Cottage and come to you, though if I consulted my own ease and inclinations, of course I never should dream of it."

It is possible that Constance looked back on those hours spent in the old woman's society with some feeling other than pleasure. We know they used to quarrel, and occasionally would not speak to each other for days. All this and a great deal more the servants at the Cottage related of them, and, indeed, mamma herself subsequently made remarks pretty much to the same effect. Mammas and daughters do occasionally quarrel we know. Most of us are acquainted with ladies who get on notoriously badly with their daughters, and abuse them, and speak ill of them to their mutual friends. But they do not as a rule point out their daughters' defects until those young ladies are happily or otherwise settled in life.

It is very possible then, I say, that Constance looked back to the days spent in her mamma's society with anything but pleasure. It is certain she declined the old woman's offer, preferring to manage her own affairs after her own fashion. But

mamma was not to be put off in that manner. She returned to the charge again and again. But for some reason which she failed to ascertain, Constance was becoming harsh and savage towards her only parent. She was barely respectful to her before her husband or her husband's uncle. When they were alone, and no restraint was placed over her tongue, she more than once alarmed that ill-used lady. She sneered at her goodness as a mother, said bitter things of her to her face, and on one occasion characterised her worldly wisdom as swindling hypocrisy. Mamma began to think that her chances of becoming a resident at The Moat were rather vague. She found it most difficult to get Constance to lend her her brougham when she wished to make an impression on her acquaintances, and began to suspect that there was no such thing as filial affection, and that her daughter, for whom she had made such sacrifices, actually disliked her. It is surprising to the author how that old woman could have failed to understand the reason of her daughter's conduct to her at this time. He has noticed the same shortness of vision in many persons who were said to be clever, and whom he has known to be of the world worldly. They can see no further than their own noses, and seem to imagine that no one rises early in the morning but themselves, and that people, dazzled by the blaze of their ability or splendour, are blind to their faults, their weaknesses, their trickeries, and their rogueries. Had the old woman been as wise as she believed herself to be, she would have stayed away from The Moat at this time, and never have gone near her daughter. There

was an ominous cloud in the atmosphere which would presently burst, and the thunder would rattle about that old campaigner's head pretty heavily. But she never dreamed of the true reason. She thought that everything she had done for her daughter was characterised by the greatest cleverness and ability, and however much Tom might have felt himself aggrieved should he become acquainted with everything, her daughter could entertain but one feeling towards her, and that was profound thankfulness. As to Tom being acquainted with everything, that was impossible. Her daughter would be a fool if he did. Brought up as she had been, and to let her husband know all her doings, it was too preposterous. Good gracious! she thought, suppose if every man knew what his wife did or said, or what debts she contracted, or paid, or left unpaid, what a disturbance there would be in society. Under such conditions the marriage state would not be worth entering. It was quite sufficient for him if the wife dressed well, paid the calls, did the honours of his house gracefully, and was civil to him before company. Of course, if there were an estate, she would be expected to provide him with an heir. But there her duties and responsibilities ceased. He would pay her dressmaker's bills, and for the carriage, and provide nurses for their pledge of affection. But as to having any control over the things he paid for, or any right to question his wife as to her manner of living, Mrs. Revell would have undergone martyrdom rather than acknowledge.

And one fine spring morning, when there was not a cloud to be seen in the sky overhead, that

thundercloud burst in the drawing-room at The Moat, and dealt, if not death, a good many bruises and hard knocks. Mamma had a few little bills outstanding, and the tradesmen were becoming impatient for their money. She had not much money at that moment, or if she had, she required it for other purposes than paying bills. Constance had a very liberal allowance from her husband, to say nothing of occasional slips of paper put into her hands by her husband's uncle, bearing that little gentleman's autograph. She also had her own fortune. There was the interest of her thousand pounds, amounting to about twenty pounds half-yearly, which, though not much, was considered more than sufficient to pay all her personal expenses before her marriage. Surely, she could never refuse her own mamma a temporary loan on such an occasion. And so the old woman told her daughter the present state of her finances, or at least as much as she thought expedient to tell her, and requested the loan of fifty pounds, only for a month. It is a singular thing that all loans, except state loans, are always for the most ridiculously short periods. The present writer never asked a friend for the loan of a ten-pound note for more than a week, and he is prepared to declare on oath he never lent any that was not to have been repaid within seven days at farthest. And so the old woman, having piled up a considerable quantity of explosives, both before and since her daughter's marriage, which only wanted the match to be applied to blow her to such a distance that she would not appear at The Moat again for some time, must needs go and throw a

,burning torch in, and then sit herself on the top of the magazine, with the expectation of warming herself.

"Fifty pounds is not much, dear!" she said to her daughter. "I'm sure I would lend you double that amount if I had it, and you wanted to borrow, which, to be sure, you never will, and I'll pay you back without fail this day month."

"No, mamma!" Constance replied, quietly. "Fifty pounds does not seem much to us, does it?" And then she burst out. The floodgates were at last raised, and the old woman caught it. "Fifty pounds!" said her daughter, savagely. "Do you know how much I am in debt already? I owe two hundred and fifty pounds this minute, and all through *you*. You bought me all these things I have, all my clothes, and jewellery, and things I never wanted, and told me *you* would pay for them. Everything I had was to be marked with my maiden initials, for fear people would imagine my husband provided my trousseau. And yet not one penny did you pay, or ever intended paying. The very dress you have on, the umbrella you carry, the bracelets on your arms, you have robbed —yes, robbed—I will say it, you have robbed my husband of. Look here! here!" she continued, opening a little rosewood Davenport, and taking out a bundle of papers. "Here are the bills that have been sent in to me—even my linen is charged to me here. And not only that, but you have had goods yourself in my name, while we were on our wedding tour. I have seen these tradesmen, and they tell me you purchased the things in my name, and had them sent to your house. Here are silk costumes,

and laces, and gold lockets and bracelets; and the very stockings you have on, for anything I know, are all charged here. And I have to pay for it all. How do you think I can do so, without my husband knowing? And if he knew, what do you think he would say? For shame, mother! for shame. You have procured these goods on false pretences, and are no better than a common swindler. And you force me to become your partner in robbing my husband."

To say that the old woman was astonished would not be doing credit to the situation. She was frightened and terrified. For some moments she knew not what to say. She had of course sometimes thought of these little pilferings and felt uneasy, but that her daughter should upbraid her after this fashion, she never once dreamed. She imagined that Constance would be put out for a day or two, and then set about saving the money out of the household expenses. It would be easy enough, she thought, to save a couple of hundred pounds in a house like The Moat. Let her dock the butcher's bill, put the servants on Australian mutton and small beer, and the thing was done. But now she was called by her own daughter a common swindler and robber. She sat down and squeezed a few tears out of her bleary old eyes, thinking possibly to melt Constance's heart by the sight of her affliction. But those tears not having the desired effect, she veered round, accused her daughter of lying and black ingratitude, and Tom of parsimony and meanness.

"After all I have done and suffered for you, that you should talk to me like this!" she whimpered. "And if I did have a dress or a locket, a pretty

thing that is to throw in your mother's face. As to your husband, he's a mean pitiful wretch, and I regret I ever demeaned myself by having anything to say to him. All the time he was coming to my house, the dinners he has eaten, the messes he has made in my drawing-room with his horrid smoking and nasty dirty boots on the antimacassars, and he never once as much as gave me the commonest little ring. I shouldn't have cared how cheap it was, it would have been something to keep for his sake. But I'll not wear them any longer—I can't take them off here very well, but I will the moment I get home, and send them all back to you," which it is needless to remark she never did.

"Don't talk like that!" Constance replied, hot as fire. "You know my husband is generous. No one knows it better. His only fault is, he is too credulous!"

"Yes, he is credulous!" mamma said, maliciously. "He believed you were only twenty, and that you were in love with him. But mark my words, ma'am. I'll let him know different, and about that other man too."

"Will you be good enough to leave the house and never enter it again?" said Constance. "Or shall I ring for the groom to put you out? My husband knows my age, and any information you can give him, you are perfectly at liberty to do."

And so mamma made her bow at The Moat, and for some weeks afterwards trotted her broken-kneed and broken-winded old screw about the country, abusing Constance, and Tom, and everyone and everything belonging to them. "And now, my dear!"

she observed to all her sympathising friends, "you see what it is to have an ungrateful daughter, and to admit into your families an upstart of a fellow from goodness knows where." She said nothing however respecting those bills, nor the solicited loan. Whatever her friends said to her, the present writer is in a position to state that behind that old soldier's back they affected to pity the very cat which earned its daily skim milk by catching the Cottage mice.

And poor Constance, after pinching and scraping for many months, and putting off the tradesmen with promises to pay, could only muster a hundred pounds, and had to make a clean breast of it after all to her husband. Tom was not angry with her, but he gave orders to the servants that should Mrs. Revell call at any future time, she was not to be admitted. And he gave Constance the money, and told her not to fret, and that she must not keep any such troubles from him again, for she was in a certain state of health in which ladies find it necessary to avoid worry and anxiety, and spend most of their time in making diminutive articles of juvenile adornment.

CHAPTER VII.

It will be remembered that while Marion was living in Hulme Terrace, Madam Zulmann, her mother, discovered her attachment to Tom, encouraging her in nursing that passion, and giving her some advice respecting it. She saw the young girl's promise of marvellous beauty, and could not believe but that the lad, brought continually in contact with her, must needs fall in love with her. When that time came, and she should see her daughter married to him, happily or otherwise, she would undo the evil she had done him, disclose to him his birth, and enable the Squire to realise his dream of seeing the Burtons, in the person of his nephew, take their place in their native county, and revive the glories of their house. She had never professed much love for her daughter, and at no time were her visits frequent to her. She had placed her, at an early age, in the charge of others, and had never given her any information as to her birth or parentage, or the manner of life her mother lived. It will not be wondered at, then, that there should be little of that love existing between them that should exist between a mother and daughter. To Marion, her mother had always been a mystery. She would, perhaps,

be in her company a few hours two or three times in the course of the year, but never in those interviews were there any of those endearments between them which one would look for between persons so nearly related. If she knew little of her mother, she knew absolutely nothing of her father, whether he was dead or alive, or anything respecting him. It is true she defrayed the cost of Marion's maintenance and education until she obtained her first engagement as an actress; but beyond that nothing had ever passed between them. There were no confidences, if we except the confession she drew from her daughter on that one occasion, no inquiries after each other's welfare, no correspondence when apart—which was always—nothing but coldness. Since her appearance before the public, her mother had ceased even her rare visits, and she was as much an orphan as though her parents had been dead and buried for years.

But during all this time, Madam Zulmann, as we shall continue to call her, had kept a narrow watch on Marion and on Tom. She knew all about Sam's proposals to her daughter, and the anything but satisfactory manner with which those proposals were received. She knew of the deep love Marion cherished for Tom, and she also knew that he was insensible to her attractions and goodness up until that night at Liverpool. His visits at the Cottage were no secret to her, and until that night, when the scales fell from his eyes and he saw what happiness he had lost, she looked on the game, as far as he was concerned, as played out. Up until the moment of his introduction to Constance, she was willing to

play his game for him, and to deal him the winning card. But when he showed a preference for the knave of diamonds to the queen of hearts, then she would make her own game, and he must abide the consequences. But after that night, when Tom knew he loved Marion with a deep, wild love, she again hoped for his union with her daughter. She had no idea of anyone keeping a promise, if the keeping it should be unpleasant or disagreeable. She understood the word "honour" in a very different sense from that in which he understood it. She could not conceive that under any circumstances duty should win a victory over strong passion and inclination, and up to the very last moment regarded Tom's marriage with Constance as impossible. But when the marriage had actually taken place, she looked on him as though he had been dead. It was now her turn, and she would play the game solely for her daughter's benefit, and her own. What was it to her that the lad was the nephew and rightful heir to the Squire? Had he not made certain promises to her years ago? Was not her daughter his daughter? What did she care for the sanction or blessing of the church? Had not that church blessed and sanctified a union between Tom and Constance, in which there was no love? Had not that church sold its benediction, and would her union with the Squire have been holier had they, too, purchased a benediction on it? Marion was their daughter, and that was sufficient. She knew well enough that as long as any chance of Tom's reappearance was possible, neither her daughter nor anyone else would be able to charm that old man's

heart. Had Tom, however, married Marion, she would have been able to say to the Squire, "See, here is your nephew and your daughter." But now he had put away fortune and happiness from him, she would ignore him as though he had been dead.

And so it happened that while Tom and his wife were living a loveless life down at The Moat, but looking forward, perhaps, to the time when their hearts *might* meet in the common bond of paternal love, and while Marion was growing paler and thinner, and going through the furnace of tribulation, which purifies when it does not scorch up and wither, Madam Zulmann journeyed down to Orleton Manor, with the intention of leading up to the winning card in the game she was playing. The long summer day had almost come to a close when she reached the Manor House. No one would have thought that the handsome, stern-looking, elderly lady, who drove up to the door in the hired fly from Baswold, was Marion the Gipsy. She had not appeared in that part of the country since the night of Tom's disappearance from his uncle's house. When she told the servants she had come to see the Squire on business, they made no difficulty, but showed her at once into the old wainscoted dining-room. Nothing seemed altered from the night on which she had had her last interview with him. The same furniture was there, arranged in precisely the same manner. The portraits of former Burtons looked out from their frames on the walls as grimly as before. No one was in the room when she entered, and she had to wait some time before the Squire made his appearance. At length she heard

his heavy tread, as firm as it had ever been, and in another moment he was standing before her. Did her heart give one bound, or her breath come quicker, when she saw the man for the first time for nearly twenty years, between whom and her there were mutual wrongs and mutual dislike, if not hatred? I think we can safely say no! Her hand was as steady and her voice as firm as ever it had been on the most ordinary occasion.

The Squire looked at his visitor a moment in expectation of her commencing the conversation. But as she remained silent, he said in the same old tones she had heard years ago, "May I inquire, ma'am, to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?"

"Then you do not know me?" she observed, in answer to his question.

"I can't say I do!" he replied, shading his eyes with his hand. "My sight is not what it used to be, and perhaps, if I have ever seen you before, it is a long time since. Time alters us, ma'am, a good bit. I daresay I'm altered myself." Indeed, the Squire had as little fault to find with time as most of us. It is true his hair was now perfectly white, and his shoulders bent, but in every other respect he was the same man he was ten years before, as hale and hearty, and keen in business, as he had ever been.

"Yes!" his visitor said, "you are altered, but not much. Your face is as hard as it was when you drove me and my child forth from this room out into the bitter winter's night. Do you know me now?"

He went up close to her, and peered into her face. If she thought, however, that her recognition would cause him any excitement, she was mistaken. He was quite as unmoved as herself, and answered her in quite as hard a voice as her own.

"Ay, lass!" he replied, "I know thee now. Th'art altered too since the night my ricks were set a-fire. Ay, thou'rt a bonny wench at that time, and I forgive thee that bit o' devilry, for sure enough I was insured, though I daresay you didn't think o' that when you set the fire a-goin'. But there's one thing, my girl, I won't forgive thee for, and I'll have my answer afore ever you leave this room, if I have to tear it out o' your heart. Where's my nevvy? answer me that, woman, witch, devil. Where's my nevvy? my little Tommy?" And he seemed to lose the bend in his shoulders, and to throw off the few marks time had left on him, as he walked erect to the door of the room and locked it. "Where's my nevvy?" he continued, sternly, when he again stood opposite to her.

She met his searching look unmoved. Her face was as impenetrable as marble, and gave no indication of her thoughts. The most innocent person in the world could not have met the Squire's gaze with less signs of guilt that she did.

"John Burton," she answered, "you are talking folly. You know I am as guiltless of your nephew's disappearance as of burning your ricks."

"I never said you weren't, did I?" the Squire said, grimly. "I said I forgave thee the fire, because I was insured, and the loss didn't fall on

me. But my nevvy is a different affair. He wasn't insured, and as sure as my name's Burton, I'll have it all out of thee, though th'art as close as th' grave."

"I tell you again, and for the last time, I know as little of one as of the other," she replied. "Your ricks were burned, and may have been set on fire by accident. If not by accident, I have yet to learn that you have no enemies in the country but myself."

"That's true enough, lass!" the Squire said, reflectively. "I'm a just man, if I be hard; and I think there are a good few who wouldn't grieve if I were burnt out again."

"And the lad, I always understood, was drowned in the river by the house," she continued.

"Ay! so they said; but that won't do," the Squire replied. "No, no! the boy was never drowned, and he'll turn up yet. I've always said he would turn up; and he will, and I shall live to see it."

"Perhaps he may!" she said, harshly. "But I doubt it. If he were alive, he would have appeared before this. But I came not to speak of your dead nephew"—and she laid some emphasis on the word dead—"but of my daughter and your daughter."

"Ay!" exclaimed the Squire. "I'd forgot all about her. I thought all that was settled when I gave thee the thousand pound. "You don't expect me to give thee any more, sure-ly. Because I tell thee I won't. All my money—an' I've saved a tidy heap, I can tell 'ee—is for my nevvy when he comes home. We have none to spare, lass, not a penny."

"I have not come to ask you for money," she replied. "Your daughter needs no gifts from you. She is earning a magnificent income by her own talents, John Burton. I came to tell you, though, that your daughter is the handsomest woman you ever saw. Far more beautiful than I was, even when you thought me beautiful."

"Ay! lord! then her'll come to no good," said the Squire. "Better she'd died when a baby. A handsome gipsy is sport for anybody." And he shook his head, as though he pitied her for the sake of common humanity; but as to acknowledge she had any claim to his love or guardianship, he never once gave it a thought. Had not every claim on him been settled with that thousand pounds?

His visitor flushed at the Squire's words. She was a gipsy, and she had been sport for him. She kept back the fierce words which sprang to her lips, and answered quite calmly—for she knew that to lose her temper would be but bad policy—"You are mistaken, John Burton. Your daughter never lived in our tents. She has been brought up and educated as well—yes, fifty times better than she would have been had she passed her life under this roof. She has seen but little of me, and knows still less. As to you, she is absolutely ignorant of your existence, or of her relationship to you. I have told you already how beautiful she is. I tell you now she is as good—yes, good and virtuous in the sense the parson's wife regards goodness and virtue—as that woman's own daughters. And as to her ability, I tell you there never has been one

of your race from the first to the last who can bear comparison with her."

"Well, well!" said the Squire, "suppose she is, what has that to do with me? I always thought I'd finished with you and finished with her, when I squared you in this room. I don't say I beant glad that the lass is a good lass, as you say she is. Let her remain good, and praps I'll do summat for her in my will. There now, I can't say no fairer than that. But how about my nevvy?"

"I've told you I know nothing of your nephew, but that I always understood he was drowned," she replied. "It is useless to ask me about him. I cannot tell you what I do not know!"

"Ay! them be fine words!" he said, in a threatening tone. "I tell thee, I don't believe a word on 'em. Praps I can find a way to make thee speak. I'm a magistrate—do you hear, woman—a magistrate, and I've half a mind to commit thee. The whole affair of that night is well remembered about here, and not a man of 'em they'd put on the jury but would find thee guilty of murder. What d'ye think o' that, eh?"

She waved her hand impatiently. "You are drivelling!" she replied. "The whole affair is an absurdity. No one could be committed on such a charge without evidence. And you have no evidence. I can prove at any moment that I was in a different part of the country when this happened. Let us say no more then, for you are wasting breath. You know I am innocent of what you say. And I tell you that I am not to be alarmed by any such threats."

"You've brass and hardihood enough for anything," said the Squire. "Will you let me hear what you ventured here for then? You would not have come merely to tell me your girl was handsome. It's dangerous even yet for you to be seen in this neighbourhood. There's one in the kitchen this minute as would tear your heart out if he knew you were here. You remember old Ben, I'll be bound. You'd better mind he doesn't remember you."

"Let us drop talking folly!" she answered. "You know I fear neither you nor your man. I came here to tell you what your daughter was, and to ask you to see her."

"Blarm the woman! What's the use o' my seeing the lass?" asked the Squire. "I aren't a-going to make her my heir, don't you think it. My nevvy 'll come back, I tell thee, sure and sartain."

"Hard man!" she exclaimed, with well-feigned horror. "Cannot the voice of nature touch your cold heart?"

"No, it can't," snarled the Squire.

"And you hope to welcome your nephew, and will deny your own child!" she continued.

The Squire was about to assure her of the correctness of her statement, when a sudden thought struck him. So he said, after a moment's pause, "Look you, my lass! you think I'm a hard man; but I tell 'ee again I beant. Maybe the girl has claims on me, and if I can persuade myself she has, I'll do what's right. But I never was a hasty man, and years have not fired my blood. I like to think over what I do, and if you'll sit down while I smoke a pipe, I'll think over what you say."

So he sat down in front of the empty fireplace and smoked his pipe, while these thoughts were running through his brain. "She, or some one by her orders, set fire to the ricks, and in the confusion which ensued stole the boy. There could be no doubt of that. People said the lad had wandered out of the house that night, and fallen into the river and been drowned. But that was impossible. Had he done so, some one must have seen him. But no one had seen him. He had surely been stolen out of revenge. And if that were the case, no one would have instigated the crime but *her*. She would know what had become of him. If she had murdered him"—and the Squire's eyes for one moment became bloodshot, and there was murder in them if ever there was in mortal eyes. "But no, that was impossible. People don't commit murders like that. They couldn't do it," he thought. "But these gipsies were not above stealing a child and hiding him. This, no doubt, was what she had done. His nephew was stolen, and perhaps was at that moment where she could place her hand on him. But he knew very well she would never produce him, nor give a sign by which he might be traced. She hoped to see her daughter—he did not think *his* daughter—take the place of his nephew. But the girl—perhaps she was not of the same stuff as this woman. She might perhaps know something of his lad, or have heard something of him. Now, if he could see her, and get into her confidence, she might drop some words which would enable him to trace his boy, and bring him home in triumph."

Having arrived at this conclusion, he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and turning towards his visitor, said with every appearance of sincerity, "Look 'ee here, lass! I've a-thought it all over, and praps, as you say, it would be only nateral for me to see my own daughter. I don't mind then if I do. But recollect, I make no promises about her. Maybe she won't like me. Maybe the voice of natur', as you said just now, won't hollo very hard. But I'll see her, though she can never be a nevvy to me."

"No!" she answered eagerly. "But she can be a daughter, *and* a son. With her beauty half the county would be at her feet. She could choose from the highest a husband, and you could induce him to assume the name of your house."

"I see your game now! You've shown your hand, ma'am!" the Squire thought. But he did not tell her he saw her hand. He merely said in his deliberate, thoughtful manner, "Ay, you be right. She might marry well, and her husband take my name. A handsome lass and a good estate might tempt a man to do that, sure-ly."

"I am glad you are beginning to look at it in a proper light," she replied, while a flush of triumph spread over her dark face. "When one arrives at your age, they are not the worse off for having an elegant daughter who is both good and beautiful. I ask nothing for myself. That is all past and gone. But I ask you to see your daughter, and when you have seen her, I am certain you will acknowledge her."

"Ay! ay! I'll see her, sure-ly," the Squire said. "But as to acknowledge her as my daughter, that's

quite a different affair. Why, you must be mad to ask me to do that. Aren't I doing as much as anyone could expect, in promising to see the lass? And whoever in their senses would ask me to acknowledge her, when everybody knows I never married? Even if I were as fond of the girl as I be of my nevvy, which I beant and never shall be, I couldn't do that. Do you think any of the young country gentlemen would want to marry her, if they knew her mother was a gipsy, and that she had no right to her father's name? Nay! nay! that'll never do."

"But if you see her, it must be as a relative," she urged. "Your life has not been so stainless, John Burton, as it might have been, and your neighbours are not less in the habit of thinking and speaking evil than the world in general. And to bring your daughter into your house without a distinct understanding as to the relationship between you would be both unjust and cruel."

"But who's talking of bringing her here?" asked the Squire. "I haven't said I would, have I? I promised I'll see her, but I beant going to be trapped into saying I'll have her in my house."

"I know that," she replied. "But I must give *her* some explanation. She will want to know who you are."

"Well, hang it, she's more particular I suppose than her mother was, or her father either, for that matter," said the Squire, rubbing his chin. "Say anything you like. It's your look out, you know, not mine. I never asked to see her. I never wanted to see her—never knew, indeed, that she was living. Tell her, if you like, I'm a relation of her father's,

and unless you told me some awful lies, and did me out of a thousand pound, you won't be far wrong in making that statement."

"Very well! I will tell her you are a relation of her father's," she answered. "You will have to go to London, though. You name any day you like, and I will bring her with me to your hotel."

"Needn't do that. I'll run up to town this day week, and you can meet me at the station, and we'll drive to where she lives. There's no use in spending a lot of money at hotels and such places, when I can get a chop somewhere in the Strand, and come down home by the mail," said the Squire.

"As you like. I will meet you at the station when you arrive," she replied. After a moment's pause, she continued, "And you have never asked me her name, or what she is doing. Have you no desire to know something of your own daughter? I should have thought that curiosity alone would have prompted you to inquire."

"Well, then, you are wrong. I beant a bit curious," said the Squire. "But I daresay you are longing to tell, so out with it, lass."

"I think you are harder-hearted than any of my race," she replied, with suppressed passion. "The commonest gipsy that ever robbed a henroost would show more affection for his own flesh and blood than you. While you are so indifferent about your own daughter, her name is on the lips of tens of thousands, for all London is ringing with the praises of Marion Zulmann!"

"Never heerd of her before," said the Squire, slowly. "What's she been and done?"

"Been and done!" repeated his visitor, with intense scorn. "She has done what never a Burton before her has done. What never a Burton has had brains to do. Not one of your family were ever famous before her, though I have no doubt many of them were *in*famous. Your daughter is the greatest tragic actress of the day."

"Is she, though? Well, sure-ly! and she's a great actress, is she?" said the Squire, as he quietly scraped his chin with his hand. "But beant them actresses up to all sorts o' games? I've heard rum tales about them and their skittish ways. And mind, lass, though you and me kicked over the traces awhile back, nobody ever heerd tell of it, and as far as womenfolk go, I'm looked on as a respectable man still. 'Twould hardly do now at my time of life to be mixed up in any vagaries."

Now although she never at any time expressed much love for her daughter, she was exceedingly angry with the Squire because he was not more interested in her. His coolness respecting Marion aggravated her beyond endurance. She flushed to an angry red, and her dark luminous eyes shot fire, as she replied, "Fool, fool, I have told you she is good even in the parson's meaning of the word. I tell you now that not only is her ability high above that of any member of your family, but her virtue is far above that of any woman of your race."

"Well, lass, I'm glad on it. 'Twould be a pity if she weren't better then some o' them the Burton's have married with in times gone by. Indeed, a many o' them was naught to boast on," said the Squire, soothingly. "Now have you told me all you wanted

to tell me? If you haven't, you had better out with it, for it's past nine o'clock, and it's a good eight-mile drive to Baswold."

"Yes!" she answered, "everything. I shall expect you at the station this day week." And she turned towards the door. But before she had left the room, the Squire, who was still shaving his chin with his hand, stopped her. "I say," he whispered, "you beant too flush o' money, I expect!"

"No," she replied, "I am not. I have educated your daughter, John Burton, and is not that enough to keep me poor?"

"Well, well, I only asked, you know! I was afraid you might be hard pushed sometimes. And look here," said the Squire, touching her on the shoulder with his forefinger. "I would stand a pretty lump o' money to anyone as would bring my nevvy back, for he's no more drowned than I am. I—I wouldn't mind a thousand. There now!"

"I tell you I cannot do it," she replied, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Not at the money, eh! Well, look here now," continued the Squire, "if I be a hard man I'm a just one. I don't mind if I say two. Yes, I'll stand two thousand if you'll bring my nevvy back."

She waved her hand with a gesture of impatience. "It is folly talking," she said. "Can I raise the dead? John Burton, you are dreaming, or getting into your second childhood."

"No, I beant! I'm sharp enough, I tell 'ee," the Squire urged. "Well, look here, I'll say three thousand—no, you won't for three thousand! You're avaricious, my lass, in your old years, though

for the matter o' that, you never were indifferent to money."

Receiving no answer, the Squire calculated for a moment how much he could bear to lose. He was very rich, he thought. His income he counted by thousands, and surely the boy was his hope in this world. His only ambition was to see that lad in his presence, to be certain he was his nephew, and no price would be too great. It was the dream of his life, and this woman could, he felt sure, realise that dream for him. Had he not waited all these years, and should he throw away a chance for the sake of a few thousands he would scarcely miss? It was a hard struggle, for the Squire did not like to part with his money. But by a great effort he gasped out, "Will nothin' tempt thee? Will five thousand? Here, strike me dead, but I'll give thee ten thousand—ten thousand goolden sovereigns, and praps own th' daughter, if thee'll bring me my nevvy." And he sank into a chair, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with trembling hands.

The offer was a tempting one. Ten thousand pounds was a fortune, and it would be sure. For one moment she hesitated, but only for one moment. "No," she thought, "he must be immensely wealthy to make such an offer, and *all—all* this wealth my daughter may perhaps win if the boy is kept from him. If she should fail to take his nephew's place in his heart, we can fall back on his offer still."

"Impossible!" she replied, coldly. I know no more than yourself. The lad must have been

drowned." And she turned and left the room before he could stop her, or put his offer in a more tempting form.

When she had gone, the Squire turned to his never-failing counsellor and friend, his pipe, which he smoked and refilled a good many times, as was his wont when he wished to consider any question of importance. And there he sat and smoked the whole night through until the sun appeared again in the east. He had marked her hesitation, and felt certain that she knew where the lad was. But he was also sure that nothing would ever induce her to tell him. Then his thoughts turned to Marion. Would the mother have kept this secret from her daughter? Might she not have dropped words in her presence, which to her might be a puzzle, but which to him, who had the key, would be plain enough? It was worth the trial. He would see the girl, and perhaps have her with him in his home, and watch her, and mark all she said, until, it might be, his patience would be rewarded. And then— and his visions took a rosy hue, and he saw the estate, which had grown larger and larger every year, having swallowed up Lord Cantrip's and a few others in the course of time, bestowing a vast influence on its owner, and perhaps a seat in Parliament and a baronetcy in the future for his nephew. And with the dawn he made up his mind to ride to Baswold and talk it over with Mr. Gaunt, the younger, his father being dead.

Having refreshed himself with a bath, and afterwards gone over the home farm, he mounted a four-year-old which he would be able to show a customer

at Baswold, thus killing two birds with one stone. But that morning the young one and the Squire did not get on well together. Whether the former was fresher than usual, or the Squire's nerve had become affected by want of sleep, we cannot state, but by the time they had got two miles from the Manor House they disagreed so much that the Squire was obliged to administer to his nag a sound thrashing; and a man at that very moment leaping a stile close by, the now thoroughly terrified animal reared straight up and came back on its rider. It looked now as though he would not be able to keep his appointment with Madam Zulmann.

Before the animal could rise, Gabriel Somers had seized the reins, and disengaged the Squire's feet from the stirrups. He then procured assistance, and they bore him home on a gate, with his white locks all dabbled with blood. "It's a bad case," the doctor said, when he had examined his patient. "A broken collar-bone and concussion of the brain. He may pull through in time, but Squire Burton will never be the same man again."

"And all for a bit of a crack like that," said Gabriel, when he heard it. "Sure, Gabriel has had many a harder knock than that, and never cared a straw. Devils! then, but it's very unfortunate not to have a thick skull." An opinion with which we believe many would agree were they not in dread of being thought egotistical.

CHAPTER VIII.

The most trivial causes frequently produce the greatest results. Had the Squire gone to bed at his usual time, and not filled and emptied that pipe of his so frequently on the night of Madam Zulmann's visit to him, he would probably have got up in the morning without his nerve having been shaken. And had he not lost his nerve, he would very likely have kept that four-year-old in order, and not have been thrown. And had he not been thrown and badly hurt, why there was Gabriel all the way from the North, to tell him about his nephew. And had Gabriel not made that journey for the purpose of informing the Squire where he might find the heir, thereby doing a good action for once in his life, and rendering Tom, for whom he had felt the greatest admiration ever since that night at Liverpool, a service, and perhaps feathering his own nest at the same time, the Squire would have kept his appointment with Marion's mother, and, in the natural course of things, would very soon have heard of his nephew from that young lady, who knew more of Tom's history than Madam Zulmann gave her credit for. But the poor old Squire had been taken home feet foremost, and placed on his bed,

where he hovered between life and death for many months. Quite sufficient time for many things to happen, changing the aspect of affairs at The Moat in no small measure, dealing ruin, death, and exile to some of those in whom the author hopes the reader feels some interest.

We know very well that in telling a story we ought to lead up gradually to great events, whether those events are charged with happiness or misery. But having at the commencement of this history resolved to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, and to relate every circumstance precisely as it occurred, we must be pardoned if, in the interest of truth, we depart somewhat from the rules of art. A few months do not seem much in a novel. Indeed, we have read many novels in which a score of years are easily got over in one chapter. And yet in actual life, a year, a month, a week, changes the tenor of our lives, closes the earthly accounts of some, opens that of others, or brings ruin and beggary where were opulence and comfort. Moreover, it not unfrequently happens that these events do not come singly; that fortune or misfortune suddenly without warning set about you, and you receive not one smile, but a hundred, not one knock on the head, but a thousand; and it may be you, who in the morning were happy as any of your neighbours, are pointed at in the evening as the most miserable of wretches. We say, then, it never rains but it pours. We have seen this theory illustrated practically so often that we have the profoundest faith in it. You no sooner establish a business, or a practice, and are above pecuniary troubles, than

your old aunt, who would have seen you starve when you were poor rather than lend you a five-pound note, turns her face to the wall, blesses you, and leaves you a fortune; or your rich uncle, who invariably buttoned up his breeches-pockets when he used to meet you in that old time when you had an intimate acquaintance with poverty, slaps you on the back, calls you "me boy," and offers, if you are ever in want of a little accommodation, which he knows you are not, you understand where to come, etc. etc. Should you be unable to pay that little bill that has been troubling you for some time, and ask your creditor not to press you just then, I'll lay fifty to one you will find your breakfast-table covered with documents of a similar character. Or if you and your wife have sighed for years in vain for an heir, and at last your hopes are to be gratified, the chances are she'll present you with twins, even if she does not put you in a position to claim Her Majesty's bounty.

After Constance's confession to her husband of her mamma's little peccadilloes, and the debts that good lady had run her up, there sprang up more confidence between those two than had before existed since their marriage. She acknowledged to herself the lad's goodness and generosity, and regarded her own and her mother's scheming life before her marriage with considerable distaste, if not loathing. She saw that the old woman's code of morality was but worldliness of the meanest type; that what she laid down as truths were but sophisms, and that to simulate love and passion for the sake of position is but dishonesty. After that meeting in London

with her old love, her lot for some time was a hard one. She had married her husband without loving him, and knowing he did not love her. And now she awoke to find that that old passion of hers was still smouldering; that the fire, though smothered, was not quite dead. We know how Tom felt. Who can say what burdens these two had to bear at that time? what heart-burnings, what regrets, what hopeless misery they experienced? It was too late now to go back. It was hopeless to *look* back. Their only course was to look forward to the time their pilgrimage would end, or to that period when another self should be given them in which their hearts might meet and centre.

But after that confession had been made, things assumed a more hopeful aspect. There was hope for those two yet, and by mutual forbearance they might go on to the end as comfortably as a good many of their neighbours. They were beginning to see that troubles well met are half conquered. They determined to meet theirs boldly, and not to reflect on their lot, because each of them had their cross to bear. Are there any among us who have no burden? Is there a single life that has not its troubles? We hear our friends speak of so-and-so as the happiest couple in the world, who have not a care, whose sky is unclouded, whose lives are one continual round of happiness and pleasure. O, blind! blind! Ye have eyes and ye see not, ears and ye hear not. Are we to trumpet our little differences at the corners of the streets? Must we stand on the house-tops and cry aloud our misery? Must my wife publish a handbill for circulation every time I swear

at the mutton, curse the butcher, or fly into a rage at the bills? Must I tell all my friends she has a temper of her own, or that she's too fond of new bonnets? And if we do not make our little miseries public, are they less miseries to us? Are we always happy because we don't choose to publish our little squabbles? If we choose to smile and grin on each other in company, shall we not when alone have a set-to, and squabble, and make it up again? Be sure every one of us have our burdens to bear, and we must bear them as best we can. And though some among us may perhaps roar, "See what a load mine is," it is possibly not one bit heavier than our neighbour's, who smiles, and writhes, and never utters a word. Indeed, then, I do not think Tom and Constance the only ones who had occasion to acknowledge themselves *miserable* sinners, and though they roared it tolerably loud to themselves, and thought that no one had such skeletons in their closets, such irrepressible skeletons, who were always thrusting themselves forward, and sitting at table with them, and rattling their whitened bones at them, and even dancing on the foot of the connubial couch, yet they had no more occasion to cry out than Mrs. Fluker, who lived at the Court, and whose daughter had shown a partiality for the groom, or Mr. Rattlinhope, of the Castle, whose only child was a poor, sickly, deformed little boy, who crawled about on crutches to sun himself in front of his father's mansion.

And we believe that Tom and Constance began to see this and to profit by it. There seemed to be less indifference between them, and each began to

show more interest in the other's pursuits. If Tom went fishing, as he had begun to do when the season advanced, his wife would take him his lunch, talk with him of his sport, and walk home with him in time to dress for dinner. She began to study him, and his ways, and inclinations, as her mamma had informed her a clever woman would do. She did what she could to charm away his melancholy, even while her own heart was sore. And soon—I will not say the old love came back, for that could never be—he felt his yoke less irksome, and even found some pleasure in her society. Instead of going out in the evening and walking fast and furious, merely to tire his body, that he might sleep and not lie awake all night tossing about and thinking of that other one, he would remain at home, and have a quiet game at billiards with Mr. Seedly, while his wife kept the score. Later on, when the summer was merging into autumn, Constance was busy, as we have before mentioned, in preparing for the advent of a little stranger. Many of my readers, I daresay, will understand what *that* means. The months of labour bestowed in preparing for the first baby is astonishing. None of my male readers can form an idea of the things required on this, the first occasion, unless they have gone through it; there is more preparation made for that one than for all the others put together. And Constance was looking forward to that time when she would be able to place a little messenger of peace in Tom's arms, and say, "Let this be a bond between us." And Tom began to feel greatly interested too. He would sit and watch his wife at work while he smoked his

everlasting pipe, and perhaps hold patterns for her, or give an opinion as to the shape of some little garment of which he had no experience. Constance might, it is true, have saved herself all this trouble, and bought for about thirty pounds as handsome a rig-out for a baby as she was able to make with the same expenditure and all her labour. But then, what young mother likes to buy her first baby's things? The labour is a labour of love, and the ridiculous little garments always appear to her eyes so much the handsomer for being the result of her own exertions. And so the autumn came on apace, and when the leaves began to look sere and yellow, Constance took less exercise than usual, and always retired to her bedroom directly after dinner. And then there was a new importation into the house, such as had not been known there, probably, for a score of years, in the person of a monthly nurse. And Tom began to be very tender to his wife, and to wait on her, and to anticipate her wishes. He was very gentle at this time, and we must confess that Constance too was milder in her manner than ladies usually are at this stage of their existence. And when he would leave his wife stitching away on one side of the fire, while nurse Watkins snored and waited for the moment when she would be wanted on the other, and step down into the dining-room to his uncle, he invariably found the little man reading over the columns of *The Field*, in which country properties and estates are advertised for sale. The *Times* was neglected altogether, the *Daily Telegraph* he had ceased taking, since he had been acknowledged by the

Bogeys as a county man and a brother; the *Standard* had no attractions for him, and the pleasantest reading he could get was the monthly lists of Messrs. Debenham, Tewson, and Farmer, or Messrs. Lockwood and Garth. He filled his pocket-book with calculations as to what percentage land could be made to pay under judicious management, and whether it were better to drain and improve your land yourself, supposing you have the money to do it, or to obtain a loan from the Government and charge it on the estate. He purchased Mr. Brown's book on the Landed Estate, and went deeply into the question of trenching and subsoiling, and carried on a correspondence with Messrs. Ransom and Sims with respect to a subsoil plough to be driven by steam. This went on for some time, until at last he told Tom one morning that he was going away for a week, but that when he returned he hoped to have some news for him. His journey was not a long one, only into Slopeshire, the neighbouring county, and he returned at the end of the week with all the manner of a man who had made up his mind. That very afternoon he walked over the farm with Tom and the bailiff, and astonished the latter very considerably by the amount of knowledge he possessed. He talked of shorthorns and Herefords as if he had been a breeder all his life. Leicesters and Shropshire Downs he understood as well as ever he had understood cotton, and he gave it as his opinion that while a landlord should not keep up a great head of ground game, the birds and pheasants nobody could quarrel with, and that he should consider no tenant of his by any means

a good specimen of the British farmer, who failed to have a few hares on his land when he came to shoot, thereby putting many strange thoughts into the head of that bailiff, who was originally from north of the Tweed, which, before night, had taken the form of these queries—was the master (Mr. Seedly) going to sell the farm, and if so, would he, the bailiff, have the refusal? Then would the stock be sold by public auction, or would he be able to purchase it at a valuation, and that valuation his own? All of which may sound superfluous when coming from one whose wages were a pound a week, a cottage, and the keep of a cow. But we all know that bailiffs, especially Scotch bailiffs, are proverbially fortunate, and *always* thrive. The same has often been said of estate agents, and, in truth, though we have known many a man of landed property come to the dogs, we never knew the agent of one fail to do well. The present writer would like to be an agent.

At dinner that evening the little man talked in a similar strain. He discoursed to Tom of the mutton, and how it should be fed. Mangolds, swedes, and clover came on with the second course. He was estate mad. He held forth on the beauties of residing on one's own property, beloved and looked up to by a thriving and industrious tenantry. He would show them what a landlord *should* be. He would have liked to have come down to dinner in a green cut-away coat with brass buttons, and breeches and top-boots. We know he would, for he deplored the degeneracy of the present race of country gentlemen, and their dashed dandified ways. "They

are not half the fellows now their fathers were, Tom," he said. "They drink French wines, smoke cigars all day long, and get up at about eleven in the morning. That isn't the way *we* used to do it. We were out as soon as our own labourers, sir, in top-boots and good homespun coats, and when we drank, Gad! we took a pull of our own old October. There are not many of us left," he continued, with a sigh, having associated himself in his own mind thoroughly with those he referred to. "There's only a few of us left, and soon there won't be any. A change, Tom, that won't be for the better, though I say it who shouldn't. Look at Sir Thomas! he was one of us. Is he anything like Bogey? As different, my boy, from his blue bird's-eye neckerchief to his well-made heavy boots, to the other, as a thorough-bred racer to a broken down cock-tail. Ay! Lord, times are changed since I——" In what manner he would have finished the sentence we are not in a position to state, for catching Tom's eye, in which was a world of drollery as the little man talked of "we country gentlemen of the old school," he burst into a hearty laugh, and said, "Gad, Tom, you rascal, you're thinking that my youth was not spent much in the society of country gentlemen, and faith, you're right. I was better acquainted with cotton than with land when I was your age, and I'm afraid I've been on the bounce. Brag ain't a bad dog, though; but Holdfast is a better. And our dog is Holdfast, Tom. And by the Lord, on the twenty-fifth of November, you'll be heir to over five thousand acres. There now."

"Do you intend to buy?" Tom inquired.

"I do. I'll have that estate as sure as my name's what it is," the little man replied. "It's all settled except paying over the money, or at least as good as settled."

"Have you actually purchased a property?" Tom asked.

"Well! I can't say that I have exactly purchased it," he replied, "but I mean to. That's what I've been away for. You didn't guess that, did you?"

"I did not. I had no idea you intended becoming a landed proprietor on so large a scale so soon," Tom said. "Where is it you have been, and what are the particulars of the property?"

"I'll tell you all about it, if you'll pass the wine. Talking is dry work. I thought you wouldn't guess what I was up to, and I meant to give you a surprise when I returned," the little man replied. "I've only been into the next county. Not a bad country to ride over. I'm sure you'll like it. Well, I've been on the look-out for an estate for some time past."

"I fancied that," Tom said, nodding his head towards a heap of newspapers in the room. "You leave your pencil marks on them."

"So I do," replied the little man, laughing. "Well, I've dropped on one at last. I saw the Raddleton Court estate advertised to be sold by auction on the twenty-fifth of next month, and I thought I would run down and see it. There are five thousand acres, Tom, in a ring fence, and about the worst managed I should think in England. The land doesn't let for ten shillings an acre all round. The fences sprawl half across the fields, which are

undrained, and grow little other than coarse feg. The hilly portions—and I should think a thousand acres come under that head—will scarcely carry a sheep to two acres. Horrible waste, isn't it? Then there's the house. Such a queer old place, full of galleries, and corridors, and I'll be bound to say ghosts. There's always a ghost attached to an old house. The present rental is under three thousand, and it may fetch perhaps thirty-three years' purchase, and the timber at a valuation."

"But why purchase an estate like that, when there are others in the market which are in a high state of cultivation," said Tom, wondering at his uncle's taste.

"Ah! there you are. You're young yet, Tom, and don't understand anything about land," the little man replied, proudly. "Now listen to me. As you will be the owner some day, it's just as well you should see your way. If you don't understand land, you understand figures. Now, calculate this in your head. Say the rental of this estate is three thousand a year, thirty-three years' purchase would be ninety-nine thousand, wouldn't it? Then say, for the sake of even numbers, twenty-one thousand for the timber—and there's a pretty lot that'll come down, my boy, when *we* go there—that'll make a hundred and twenty thousand. Now, suppose four thousand acres are drained at a cost of eight pounds an acre, that will make the sum total up to a hundred and fifty-two thousand pounds. Now, in five years' time, that land, that lets for ten shillings an acre now, will be worth thirty shillings an acre all round. That's six thousand a year. Now, if I were to sell them at

thirty-three years' purchase, I should get a hundred and ninety-eight thousand. There would be a clear gain of forty-six thousand pounds, to say nothing of the timber, or the thousand acres of hill land. Now if I were to buy a place already at its best, it would never be worth more than at the present time. That is the beauty of going in for an improvable estate. And then the influence, Tom, that five thousand acres gives a man!"

"What a country squire you will make!" said Tom, laughing. "You'll introduce a new era into that part of the world, I'll be bound."

"I think I shall," replied the little man. "They want to be shown how to do it down there. Their plantations are ruinously mismanaged. I'll be bound to say they pay little more than the land would if grubbed up and made into sheep-walks. Why, good gracious, it's surprising to me how they can be so blind to their own interests and the interest of their families. Their plantations should be a provision for their younger sons and daughters. Now there's them thousand acres of ours—they will be ours, you know—they are worth nothing at present. We'll drain 'em with open ditches, plant them with larch and Scotch fir, and in twenty years they will be fit to fall. And what a fortune, Tom, for the young ones! It's the best paying crop going, if you can only wait for your money. I'd wish no better than to be one-and-twenty, as healthy and strong as you are, and to be the owner of a thousand acres of well-grown larch. Gad, my boy, I'd spend this season in Leicestershire, and have six days a week with the Quorn or Pytchley, as sure as my name is Silas."

"And then it might be a worse country to ride over," continued the little man, sipping his wine. "The kennels are only five miles off, and all the coverts hold foxes, they tell me. It doesn't appear to me to be like the country hereabout, where you fly your fences, except the doubles. We shall want good, well-bred, quick, and clever horses there, those that will creep as well as jump, for some parts, I fancy, are rather cramped. But we'll have a rattling good stud, Tom, and five days a fortnight will be our ticket. A capital stream runs through the estate, but no trout. We can remedy that in time though. And then what covert shooting we'll have. There's a sight of underwood there."

"You seem to be well posted up about woods and growing timber," Tom remarked, with a smile. "Were you always acquainted with the subject, uncle?"

"Tom, you shouldn't quiz," replied the little man, while a blush spread over his jolly face. "Always deal tenderly with the weaknesses of your elders. I'm beginning to look on myself as a large landed proprietor, and of course I've—ah—acquired certain information, you rascal. The fact is, I took with me one of the partners in a large timber commission business, and he posted me up. Live and learn, you know. I'm not above learning. Some people are."

"But how will you pay for this property? I always thought your fortune was no more than sixty thousand pounds," Tom said.

"Ha! ha! you forget the bank!" the little man laughed triumphantly. "That bank has made me, and made you. There has not been a call since the

company has existed. I knew there wouldn't be. It was safe to buy twice as many shares as you had money to pay for, for one-half the capital was certain only to be called up. Besides, the shares were bound to rise, and I did what I didn't like doing, I can tell you. It looked so much like the old speculating days. I bought up every share I could get as far as my money went, and deposited the stock with the bankers, and drew on them and purchased more. I've paid off a good deal of that, for we've been paying fifteen and twenty per cent. dividends. Think of that. I went into the whole affair at the time, and was certain it must succeed. And this moment, at the present price of stock, I'm worth a hundred and fifty thousand pound. And—" and here he looked at Tom triumphantly over the edge of his glass—" I sell next week."

" I congratulate you, uncle," said Tom. " I shall offer you further congratulations when you have realised. I should not have been able to sleep if I carried all my eggs in one basket."

" I'm an old soldier, and have sat on gunpowder a good many times before," replied the little man with pardonable pride. " Many a time I've gone to my office uncertain whether I should be in the Gazette by the evening or not. But this affair is nothing after you've been in cotton."

A servant entered at this moment, with a request " that Mr. Thomas would step up to the missus, as she was very poorly."

Tom rose from the table in an instant, and left the room. In a few minutes afterwards he returned, looking very nervous and pale.

"Is she ——?" inquired Mr. Seedly, anxiously.

Tom nodded. "I must be off," he said. "I'll take the dogcart, and bring Dr. Southcott back with me."

"No, no!" the little man said, rising from his seat and detaining him. "John shall go. You mustn't go away. Constance might ask for you. She might want you to comfort her, you know. And besides, I don't like to be left alone under the circumstances. I—I was never in a house where a lady was about to be—ah—was poorly, as you may say, upstairs before."

"Then let me send him off at once," said Tom. "I don't like not having a doctor in the house. We ought to have engaged one to sleep here. Do you think I had better send for two? I'm not sure whether one will be enough or not."

"Indeed, I don't know," the little man replied. "You see, Tom, all this is new to me. Doctors are awful jealous fellows, you know. If Southcott should find another here, he'd perhaps pitch the whole concern over, and that would never do. We can give him a hint that if he should want any assistance we'll have in a couple more in no time. But here is the nurse."

"Well nurse! how is she? Nothing happened yet, I hope," said Tom excitedly.

"Lor! no, sir," she replied, dropping a curtsey. "It takes a goodish while sometimes, sir, and it's a great blessin' when over. I've a-gone through it all myself, sir, having 'ad fourteen, and two 'misses'."

"She means fourteen boys and two girls," whispered the little man to Tom.

"Oh, yes, sir," continued the nurse, after she had wiped her nose on her apron, for she had a cold, "some is at it for hours; I've known 'em to be in their trouble for days. But its nothink yet with Mrs. Seedly, sir. She's catchin' it sharp, but not often. And she's askin' for you, sir, poor dear, to go and sit with her. They always like their husbands to be with 'em with the first. I'm sure you'll do her good, poor dear young thing, and she in trouble. And you 'old 'er 'ands, sir, as'll be very comfortin'. And I 'ope as she'll catch it sharp and quick, and the 'arder the storm the sooner 'tis over, which I always said and will maintain, and please to 'old 'er 'ands."

We are not going to disclose what Tom did to comfort his wife, for he never informed us. That he did comfort her, I have no doubt, and would have continued to do so, had not Dr. Southcott told him he would be better downstairs. What anxious moments those were to the two men! It was something new and mysterious and awful to both of them. They talked across the table in whispers, when they did speak, which was not often. Tom tried hard to smoke, but the tobacco wouldn't burn, and the pipe wouldn't draw. Presently he went to the door, holding it open while he listened. Then he went into the hall, and to the foot of the stairs. Mr. Seedly was not going to be left alone under such circumstances as these, you may be sure. That little man's flesh was beginning to creep. He left the room, too, to keep Tom company. "Did you hear anything then?" the little man would ask in a whisper. "No! did you?" Tom would whisper back. And then they would be silent for awhile, until

they heard a footstep overhead, which would make their hearts thump away at their ribs as hard as if they had been having a half mile-spin up an embankment. Then Tom would creep a step or two higher and sit down, the little man closely following him. And so they went up, and up, until Tom was sitting on the top step of the stairs, and Mr. Seedly a couple or so lower down. Here they remained watching and listening far into the night, until the silence of the house and the lateness of the hour acting on the little man, he quietly and unconsciously leaned his head aganist the corner of the step above him, and snored.

But Tom could not have shut his eyes for one moment if you had offered him a guinea a wink. His nerves were at their utmost tension, and there he sat on the top step of the stairs with his eyes fixed on the bedroom door. At length, about three o'clock, he heard a sound he had never heard before—a sound which thrilled through him, and awakened within him new feelings of utter strangeness. A feeling of strange happiness, and of tender pity for the helpless, filled his heart and his eyes. The sound he had heard was the cry of a new-born child. Tom felt himself a father.

Presently the nurse came out of the room, and on seeing Tom sitting on the top step of the stairs, and the little man asleep a couple lower down, she said, "Lor! well, I never. Ah! indeed, sir, it's easy to see where your 'art is. It's in that bedroom, that's where. And he's a beauty! the very himage of his par, as I said to the doctor the minute I clapped eyes on 'im."

"Is he a boy or a girl?" inquired Tom, excitedly.

"A boy, sir, and a very nice little 'un too," nurse replied. Then turning to where the little man reclined, Tom shook him gently, and whispered loudly in his ear, "Uncle, it's all over."

"Eh!" said the little man, rousing himself, "what's up? Blow me if I haven't been having forty winks, a thing I declare I never did in my life before. Is it all right?"

"Yes," Tom replied, proudly, for he already felt an addition of dignity to be his.

"How many?" inquired the little man.

"Lor, sir! you *are* funny" said nurse. "Why how many should you think? One at a time is enough, I should say!

"And what is he?" asks the little man, putting his hand in his trousers pocket.

"A boy, sir, as I was just telling his par!" nurse answered.

"Thank god! I was afraid he was a girl" murmured the little man. "Here's a sovereign, nurse. You would have had only ten shillings if he'd been a girl."

"Can we see him, nurse?" Tom inquired.

"In a minute," nurse replied. "She would bring him out for one second, for his poor dear mar musn't be disturbed at no price."

And she brought the little fellow out, and placed him wailing in their arms. And they kissed him, or rather Tom did, the little man saying he would do it farther on when he was a bit bigger, and went downstairs, and smoked, and planned *such* a future for that little helpless piece of mortality upstairs. Ah, me!

CHAPTER IX.

This little wailing infant brought a good deal of happiness to Tom and Constance. He could not but regard the mother of his boy with tenderness, and she forgot all but his goodness, and generosity, and high sense of honour, in the birth of her child. In his joy at having a son born to him, all bitterness and ill-feeling had gone out from him, and he was at peace with all men. So he sent off a messenger with the news the next day to Mrs. Revell. You may be sure that old forager was not long in putting in an appearance. The opportunity for acquiring a footing in her daughter's house was too good to be lost. Constance would be sure to have no time for any other occupation than watching her baby, and unless some one were put over the house, things would go to rack and ruin. She would not let the memory of her wrongs stand in the way of her duty. Her duty was to look after her daughter's and her son-in-law's welfare, and she was quite prepared to do it. She would not broach the subject yet, for it would be better to let Constance find out how helpless she would be, and perhaps the request might come from her. At any rate, if she gave her time to discover it was an impossibility for a young

mother to look after her first baby, even with the assistance of any number of nurses, and to keep a strict watch over the servants at the same time, the chances would be greatly in favour of her being asked to remain with them for a time. "And," thought mamma, "if I once do get a footing in that house, I shall be a bigger fool than ever I fancied myself if I leave it again. A hundred a year might be made easily there in provisioning the house, to say nothing of the use of the carriage." So she immediately packed a few things in a carpet bag, placed it under the seat of her carriage, and drove to The Moat.

Tom was exceedingly kind to the old woman. He placed the baby in her arms, and mamma knowing the weakness of young fathers, immediately discovered the most astonishing likeness in the baby to Tom. He liked to think the little one was like him. This was after mamma had spoken to Constance, and kissed her. There was no ill-will, or remembrance of what had passed between them, in Constance's mind when she welcomed her mother in a whisper. She was very weak, as ladies usually are after such trials; and the tears started to her eyes, and ran slowly down her white face, as she looked first at her husband, who was leaning over her on one side of the bed, and at her mother, who was standing on the other. She did think, though, that Tom had much to forgive that old woman, and that her mamma had much to repent of. And she cast an appealing glance at her husband, and taking his big brown hand in hers, which was now so thin and transparent, she placed it in the old woman's, who squeezed it hard, let it drop, and then rubbed her

nose, and placed her handkerchief to her eyes, which were *not* wet. And in this manner the reconciliation took place. This was as it should be, mamma thought, and immediately commenced to take her bonnet off. She told Constance she had come to nurse her. That as soon as ever she had heard of what had taken place, of the arrival of the "blessed child," she called it, she determined to do her duty. A mother's duty is to stand by her child when in trouble, to nurse her in sickness, to watch over her during her period of convalescence. She would do her duty. She would nurse and watch over Constance, and for that purpose she was there.

But although Tom had forgiven his mother-in-law her little trespasses, he was quite sharp enough not to put her in the way of temptation again. There was a time when he had liked that old woman. But at that time he was also fond of everything at the Cottage. Those were the days when his passion for Constance threw a halo on everything that surrounded her. It was different now. He had no wish but to be friendly with her, but as to have her in the house with them, he never would. And this determination was come to without any reference to his own personal feelings. His wife required rest and perfect quietness for her recovery, and these he knew very well she would not have as long as mamma was with her. The old woman, if left alone, would have talked, and magged, and seen the bottoms of the wardrobes and drawers, and perhaps have appropriated a few articles of dress or jewellery. She was not above forcing a loan from her daughter, or her daughter's husband, as we know. "If we can't make

use of our friends and relatives, what is the use of having friends and relatives?" was a question she frequently put to herself. She thought that now perhaps the time had come when the proposal she had hinted at to Constance long before might be agreed to: "When you are married and settled near me, my dear," she had observed on one occasion, "it will be pleasant in many ways. We shall be able to assist each other—to borrow and lend." Had this proposal met with Constance's approval, we have no doubt there would have been a good deal of borrowing and lending; but the borrowing would be done by the old woman, and the lending by Constance.

But Tom was not to be drawn into giving her an invitation to remain. The old woman had endeavoured to pave the way for that invitation too. When Tom left the room for a moment, she was loud in his praises—quite loud enough to jar on her daughter's nerves, and to reach Tom's ears outside, which indeed was her object. "She always liked him," she said. "He was everything a husband ought to be, and me child was blessed," and a great deal more to the same purpose. But it would not do. He told her that they did not expect her to sacrifice her own comfort by remaining away from her own house. "They had an experienced nurse," he said, "and they could not dream of troubling her."

"But you don't know a mother's heart," she urged. "My place is in this room, and it's a pleasure to wait on me child, and not a trouble. And I'll just send down for a few things I brought with me ——"

But Tom would not consent to any such an arrangement. He gravely told her, that in his wife's present state he should insist on perfect quiet being kept in the room, and an absence of anything that might tend to excite her. "And would she step down stairs and take some lunch before she left? Of course," he said, "it will be very pleasant for Constance, and—and myself to think on your kind offer, but we cannot accept it."

Mamma had lunch before she left, and her old screw was fed in the stables. She would make another attempt, she thought. The next time she would try her daughter, but should she fail to gain her over to her way of thinking, they had better look out. She would make that part of the country rather warm for them, or her name was not Revell.

Now during the last few days the daily papers were scarcely looked at at The Moat, for various reasons. We know Mr. Seedly was so absorbed in his calculations and plans respecting the Raddleton Court estate, that he had time for nothing else; and Tom, though he might run his eye over the *Field* columns, never by any chance paid attention to the money articles in the *Times* or *Standard*, which, indeed, remained unopened on the table in the library. This was rather unfortunate, for had either of them cast their eyes down the columns of those papers, they would have read something that was calculated to create considerable alarm.

A long period of commercial prosperity had produced what it always does produce, a fabulous amount of speculation. For a considerable period money had been going a-begging, and any man of

known good business ability could obtain almost any accommodation he wished for. The consequence was, that numbers set up in business who had little or no capital but what they borrowed from the Banks. The bills of these firms, accepted by other firms of similar standing, had been discounted without the slightest difficulty. This very ease of obtaining money induced men to enter on business transactions of great magnitude, and directly there should come a depression in trade, there would be a monetary crisis. Such a crisis had come. The East India trade had been carried on at a loss for some time, and at length the day arrived that one of the largest firms in the country could carry on no longer. This suspension involved the fall of many minor houses, and the losses fell of course on the Banks which had discounted their paper. Of those Banks, the Utopian Banking Company had done the greatest business in these bills, and grave fears were entertained for its stability. It was in this Company that Mr. Seedly had invested his money, and it was by the sale of these Bank shares that the Raddleton Court estate was to be purchased.

It was on the sixth day after the birth of Tom's little boy that Mr. Seedly became aware of his impending ruin. The little man was sitting at breakfast with Tom, and full as usual of what he should do when he became a large landed proprietor. The *Times* lay on the table by his side as usual, unopened. At length, breaking off in the middle of a description of the stabling he should put up at Raddleton Court, he said, "Now Tom, we sell out of the Bank this week. I have not looked at the stock and

share list for nearly a fortnight, so I think it is quite time to see how our shares stand. I shouldn't wonder if they've gone up!"

The little man tore off the cover, opened the paper, and rapidly cast his eye over the City article. Presently Tom saw his ruddy face blanch to a deathly white. The perspiration started in great drops on his forehead, and his hands trembled as though he had an attack of ague. The paper dropped from his grasp, and he pulled frantically at his neckcloth as though he were suffocating.

"Good God, uncle, what is the matter?" asked Tom, springing from his seat and hastening to him. For a moment Mr. Seedly did not answer. He was tearing away at his throat. Tom undid his neckerchief, and poured him out a glass of brandy and water, which he drank at a single draught. "There! there! my poor boy," gasped the little man when he had dropped the glass to the table, we're ruined. Read that! and he placed his hand on the money article of the *Times*.

With a hand quite as unsteady and a face quite as white as his uncle's, Tom took up the paper, and read, "The failure of Messrs. Ballance and Co., India Merchants, this day, has taken the whole commercial world with surprise. No firm was more respected. Their liabilities are estimated at over two millions. The suspension of this house has involved that of many others, who were the acceptors of their bills. The greater part of these losses are said to fall on the Utopian Banking Company, for whose solvency the gravest fears are entertained."

"This is a terrible blow for you!" said Tom.

Ruin! ruin!" the little man replied hoarsely. He was resting his head on his arms upon the table, and appeared utterly broken. Presently he rose up and paced frantically up and down the room. "A curse on my cupidity!" he exclaimed from out of his clenched teeth. "A thousand curses on my greed." And then the paroxysm of passion leaving as suddenly as it took possession of him, he dropped into a chair, and moaned, "O, my poor boy! my poor Tom! my poor, ruined dear. I've ruined you, ruined you, ruined you! Don't look at me. Don't pity me. Don't speak to me. That money I regarded as a trust for you, and I've lost it. I've robbed you of it."

"But is it as bad as you fear?" asked Tom. "At the time of going to press, the Bank had not stopped payment, and it may pull through yet!"

"I'm afraid it is impossible," Mr. Seedly moaned. "When such an article as that appears, the firm is doomed. Even were it possible for the company to survive before that paragraph was written, it will be impossible now. By this time there will have been a run on the Bank, and payment stopped. I wouldn't have cared so much for myself," he presently continued; "I've had my day, and the little that is left would keep me going for the few years I may live. But you! you! it's horrible to have *your* prospects blasted at the very moment of realisation. Another week, my dear, and you would have been safe, and I should have seen you, as it has been my ambition to see you, a county man. But now I've ruined you! utterly ruined you, and I think the best thing I can do now is to die."

"You must not talk in this manner, uncle!" Tom said, taking the little man's hand. "You look at things in too despairing a light. I am not sorry for myself, for I am young and strong, and, please God, we'll build the house up again. What grieves me is, that *you* should lose the labour of a score of years at a time when ease and rest are more necessary to you than it would have been had you been younger. Cheer up, uncle! you know it is just possible the Bank has not stopped payment, and even if it has, we have still enough to give us a fresh start in life, and with your experience and my labour, we may in time rebuild the fortune we have lost."

"It's gone, Tom! I feel sure it's gone. That paragraph would destroy the credit of the Bank of England. At the present moment I am a beggar," the little man groaned.

"Not so bad as that," Tom said, trying to cheer him. "There's The Moat and the farm left to us still, even if the rest is gone."

"Thank God, it's settled on you!" the little man said, looking up. "Had it not been, it would have had to go too. But it will keep your head above water, my boy, at any rate."

"Thank God it is," Tom said. "For we can restore to you what you have given us."

"You can't do that, my boy," the little man replied, smiling a sickly smile, and thinking of the settlements. "But finish your breakfast, Tom, if you can—I can't. And then we'll run into Manchester, and hear the worst."

By the time they reached the railway station, all

England knew that the Utopian Banking Company had failed for eight millions; and thousands of families, who had invested perhaps the savings of a lifetime in that concern, were ruined. The balance of the nominal value of the shares would have to be called up for the satisfaction of the creditors, and those who had anything not invested in the wreck, would lose probably all. But few had anything to pay the calls with which would be made on them. Like Mr. Seedly, they had purchased probably double the number of shares they could pay for, on the chance of having to pay for them but half the nominal value.

Mr. Seedly and Tom went to Manchester, and learned what particulars were known. When they returned home, the little man proceeded to his bedroom, thoroughly stupified by his misfortunes. His mind had become twisted, and he looked on himself as having caused the ruin of the one he loved more than all the world. For a long time past his life had been merging into that of Tom. It was for him he schemed and planned, and built castles in the air. It had become almost a mania with him to make an estate for the son of his dead love. He did not look on his fortune any longer as his own, but as Tom's. He regarded himself as a trustee for the lad. This warping of his mind had not taken place all at once. It was a growth of time. But the feeling was a pleasant one, and he had nursed it and fondled it, until it had usurped the place of his better judgment. Up until the last two years he had had no thought of tempting fortune again, nor any desire to increase his wealth. He had enough for every

want, and most of the luxuries of life. But his great love for the lad had stirred up new thoughts, and new ambitions. In Tom he would live his life over again. And so this idea grew and gained strength. And we know the result. Here he was, ruined. He did not think *he* only was ruined. His mind did not dwell on the loss as a personal one. He thought only of his boy—the boy of that angel in Heaven whose presence he ever felt about him. And as he thought of him, he writhed in his agony. He had risked and lost that lad's money—not his own. He had betrayed his trust. What punishment then, he thought, was too great for him to bear? How could he redeem the past? Alas! it was beyond redemption. He could never hope, as Tom had suggested, to rebuild the house he had thrown down. He was advanced in years, and his grey hairs were dishonoured. And then a dread of facing the lad—who indeed thought but little of his own loss, "for am I not but the creature of his bounty?" he said—took possession of him, and with that feeling a morbid fancy that men who had failed to keep their trust had better die. And when that thought took possession of him, his eyes became bloodshot, and a marked change for the worse came over him. His face assumed an ashen pallor, and a wild light gleamed from his eyes. He had been sitting in his chair, with his head resting on the dressing table, he knew not how long. In reality it had been hours.

He had gone with reeling steps to his room soon after twelve o'clock, and when he rose from his chair it was after six in the evening. His eye fell

on the reflection of his features in the glass on the table. The change was a terrible one, and he started. "The brand of a felon is already on me!" he said. "Men's faces change like this when they have committed murder or robbed orphans." His brain was on fire. He opened the window and looked out. The rain clouds, which had been threatening all day, had gathered overhead until they formed one dense black canopy which threw a gloom over everything. He looked up into the sky. There was not a single rent in the dark masses overhead, nor a glimpse of a silver cloud. "Heaven frowns on me and condemns me. My heart condemns me. There is no hope above. No hope here." He opened a small writing-desk that stood on the chest of drawers, and taking a sheet of note paper, commenced to write. After a few sentences, however, he tore it up, saying, "My brain is scorched up. I cannot write. He will know why I do it." He then went to a corner of the room in which was leaning a double-barrel muzzle-loading gun. It had stood there for the last three seasons, merely from a fancy to have some weapon in his room. His breech-loaders were in the library downstairs. He took up the gun, a Westly-Richard, and examined it. The barrels were covered with dust, which he wiped away with his silk handkerchief. He put his finger in the muzzles and rubbed off a slight rust which was there, and after springing back the hammers, blew down the barrels to get rid of any dust that might be inside. Having done this he proceeded carefully, and with a hand that was steady enough now, to load the piece.

Now when Mr. Seedly went to his room that morning on their return from Manchester, Tom went to his wife's apartment, with the intention of remaining there until she was well enough to hear of their altered fortunes. His dread was, that some one might tell her in her present weak state, and the result of such a shock he knew would be most lamentable. He also knew that unless he remained in that room on guard, some kind neighbour or friend would be sure to bring her the news. He had lived quite long enough in the world to know that evil tidings travel quicker than good tidings, and that the more deplorable those tidings are, and the greater the pain they will cause us to suffer, the greater the pleasure our friends have in being the bearers. They like to probe us and see us wince, and if they can put the lancet into a particularly tender part, you may be sure they will do so. If you wish to have your particular double tooth drawn without pain, just pay a visit to my friend Mr. King the dentist, and he will extract your grinder before you can wink, and you will feel a great hole in your cheek before you actually know your tooth is out. But if you really desire to experience how much pain that operation can give you, open your mouth, give the forceps to a personal friend, and say "pull." He will enter into the business, and watch your contortions, and listen to your roaring with the keenest pleasure. And as to pulling, he will maul you, and wrench you, and torture you for half an hour, merely as a study. And so Tom took up his post by his wife's bedside, and gave orders that no one, not even the doctor,

if he should call, should be shown upstairs without first asking his permission. The nurse he strictly prohibited from leaving the room on any pretence whatever, except as far as his dressing-room, which communicated with the bed-room. The other door of the dressing-room, which opened out on the gallery, he locked and placed the key in his pocket.

And so he sat there until the evening. By-and-by, however, thinking that Mr. Seedly would think it strange he remained there, and not be with him in this his great trouble, he sent the nurse downstairs to ask him if he would step up to him. But when she returned and informed him that Mr. Seedly had not come out of his bed-room yet, he began to feel uneasy. "Perhaps he was ill," he thought. "This great misfortune may have brought on heart disease, or he may during all these hours have been in a fit." This thought alarmed him, and telling Constance he would return in a moment, he hastened to Mr. Seedly's bed-room, and knocked at the door. But no answer being given, he tried to open it, and found it was locked. Trembling all over, he placed his ear to the keyhole, and heard a sound that drove all the blood in his body first up to his brain, and then back to his heart. *It was the sound made by the contact of a ramrod against the steel barrels of a gun in ramming home the charge.* A great dread took possession of him, and for a moment he shook as if with palsy. Then with a prayer in his heart, and a wild, half-stifled cry on his lips, he hurled himself against the door and burst it open. Mr. Seedly was sitting on the side of his bed, with the muzzle of the gun placed to his

forehead. A cord was attached to the trigger, and passed underneath the trigger guard. He held the end in his hand. Another moment, and this good, this noble heart, would have ceased to beat, and an inquest would have been held on the mutilated remains, and the jury would have returned a righteous verdict of "Temporary insanity." But the end was not yet come for him. There was yet work for him to do, and Providence interposed at the last moment to prevent his becoming a suicide. With a spring like that of a wounded young lion, the lad leaped across the bed, and wrenched the gun from his hand.

"Thank God, you are safe!" Tom cried. "Oh, uncle! uncle, what were you doing?" And then he burst into a fit of hysterical sobs, and threw his great strong arms around the little man, and kissed him, and cried, and laughed, and sobbed, and thanked Heaven he was in time.

For some moments Mr. Seedly seemed stupefied. The wild look had now left his eyes, and his brain was clear of that rush of blood which had pointed to self-destruction as the only atonement for an error of judgment. He passed his hand dreamily across his forehead, and said, "What is it? what have I been doing?" Then his eye falling on the gun which Tom was holding from him, he had a cold trembling fit, and the horror of his contemplated act flashed upon him. "Oh, my God!" he exclaimed, "I see it all. I was mad, Tom! I was mad. Oh, Christ, forgive me!"

"Amen!" said Tom in hysterical sobs.

And then these two men, one, it is true, past his

prime, but the other in all the glory of his strength and manhood, with their arms around each other's necks like little children, knelt down in all humility, and repentance, and thankfulness, and said, "Our father which art in heaven!"

CHAPTER X.

We have said that all England knew that day of the failure of the Utopian Banking Company. The news reached even the little village of Chirkwell by two o'clock. It was well known in the neighbourhood that Mr. Seedly was one of the largest shareholders, and many of the surrounding gentry had envied him his luck in being the possessor of shares in so well-paying a concern. But now it was all changed. Some pitied, some were glad, for they disliked to see any man grow wealthy but themselves, and all of them always knew how it would end. The Bogeys heard of the failure, and thanked heaven that neither of the girls had taken up with that adventurer and upstart. Lady Bogey wondered how it was she had admitted them into her society. Trade under any circumstances was low, but unsuccessful trade was damnable. She hoped they would see their position now, and not presume on an acquaintance formed under different circumstances. Otherwise she would cut them. They all determined to cut them, although the Misses Bogey would have liked to have paid Constance a visit, to have condoled with her. It is so pleasant to condole with one's friends or enemies. It is a

species of triumph of which the female heart is very fond. If they could only have one hour with Constance, in which to pity her, and crow over her, they would cut her dead on the very next occasion they met. But her ladyship would hear of nothing so preposterous. Those people at The Moat were tabooed; their light, which had burned brightly enough before, and at which the Bogeys would have had no objection to have warmed themselves, had gone out. Even Mr. Bogey was lectured on his partiality for the society at The Moat, and requested to cease his visits there. He was not long in making up his mind to obey those injunctions. He owed Tom that thirty pounds, and he discussed the question of repayment, sitting on the corn-bin in the stable. "They are regularly burst up!" that young gentleman observed to himself. "Everybody says that all they have left must go. The creditors of the company will be down on them, and they must pay the shot." Under these circumstances, he thought he should not be justified in handing over to Tom the thirty pounds. Should he do so, no doubt they would spend it, and the creditors would be defrauded to that amount. He would be a party to nothing like a fraud. He wasn't going to be mixed up in any way with a disreputable bankrupt beggar. They had nothing to show for the money, not even an I O U. When the affairs of the Company were wound up, they might recover it if they could. But he was not going to pay them the money, and he wouldn't. And Mr. Bogey lighted his pipe, and told himself there was no occasion to pay what he had never intended paying. Should he happen to meet

either Tom or Mr. Seedly, he would not see them. They would hardly come out hunting next month, he thought; surely they would not have hardihood enough for that, even if they were able to keep a horse or two, which they never could do. They were regularly done, put in a hole, from which nothing could extricate them, and they would probably have to run the country, or set up a shop again. And as this thought crossed his mind, he determined to speak to them *once* more before he cut them. He would give them a little sound advice. The tobacco business was a good one, he had heard. He would advise them to take a shop in Manchester, and set up as tobacconists, and he would have an account with them. He would get lots of fellows to patronise them, and to give them a start. He would give them a large order for cigars and tobacco at once; he would, by Jove. He would withdraw his custom from Underwood, who was an ungrateful beggar. That worthy tradesman had intimated to Mr. Bogey that he could supply him with no more cigars or smoking mixtures until his little account was settled.

The evil tidings having been whispered in Chirkwell, it may be supposed it was not long in reaching the ears of Mrs. Revell. Mr. Fallow had heard it at the Railway Station, and he told it to Richard, the groom at the Cottage, who told the cook, who at once dropped the pan she was scrubbing and rushed into Mrs. Revell's presence with the information that Mr. Seedly was burst up and was not worth a brass farthing. Here was a terrible blow to the old woman. She had schemed and manœuvred for

years to marry her daughter to a wealthy man, and when she had succeeded, as she thought, it turns out he is little other than a beggar. What bitter thoughts rose in her mind! How she immediately conceived a hatred of The Moat and all in it! Her thoughts after the first few moments took an eminently practical turn. She began to calculate the results if this should turn out to be true. Mr. Seedly ruined! That meant that Tom and Constance were almost ruined. Here then was an end to all her plans. There would be no carriage at The Moat now, and all expenses would be cut down to the lowest possible ebb. Perhaps The Moat would be let. She was sure it would have to be, and Tom would be obliged to live in the bailiff's cottage, and drive a team, and work like any labourer. Perhaps they wouldn't be able even to keep a servant, and Constance would have to do the household work, mind the baby, cook the dinner when there was anything to cook, and milk the cows. A nice thing it would be for her. What would the neighbourhood say when they should hear of her daughter having to perform the duties of a common servant? Perhaps they would want to come and live with her! And her old face looked as hard as granite when that thought crossed her mind. If they had been wealthy, she would have received them with open arms, for the results would have been the same as though she had gone to live with them. It would have been their money which would have paid the bills, and in their carriage she would have paid her calls, about the only thing she did pay without compulsion. But poor and needy, she never would receive them. Her

door was closed against them from henceforth, or until such time as they should be above the necessity of her assistance. Constance had made her own bed, and must lie on it. And as to her husband, he, who was awhile ago the best, the noblest, the most generous of men, and all that the fondest mother-in-law could desire, was now an impostor, a wretch, a proud, adventuring upstart. But she would let them know her mind. She would show him she was far above him, or his beggarly uncle, in every respect. She wasn't an impostor or a pauper. He had refused to allow her to live with them. She would now show him from whom refusals were to come. A little advice, however, she, as Constance's mother, would give them. Perhaps this disgraceful affair would be kept from her daughter. They were quite equal to leaving her child in the dark. But she would enlighten her. She would tell her all, and very likely a good deal more. And for this purpose her carriage was ordered round, and she set off as fast as her broken-down old screw could crawl to The Moat.

She arrived there just when Tom was hurling himself against the door of Mr. Seedly's bed-room. There was no need of ceremony now, for weren't they ruined? Who stands on ceremony with people whose game is played out? Who would be fool enough to be polite to beggars? The auctioneer and his men would be there soon, and the rooms filled with Jews and Gentiles who would soil the carpets with their dirty boots, and recline on the couches and chairs which Constance would scarcely consent to touch. "Take the horse round to the stables, Richard" she said to

her coachman, "and have him fed. And if you can put some corn in a bag, do so, and we'll take it home with us. For sure if we do not, the groom will sell all he can, now his master is ruined."

She did not ring the bell. That house was hardly their own now. She opened the door, and walked into the hall. The door of the drawing-room was open, and she thought she would just step in and see whether the furniture or ornaments looked differently now. On the mantelpiece was a little morocco case containing a large emerald set with diamonds, in the form of a brooch, which Tom had purchased the day before to present his wife with on her recovery. The old woman examined it carefully. "Wasteful extravagance," she said to herself. "Wicked profligacy." This must have cost a lot of money, and he to buy it when they are beggars. Perhaps it isn't even paid for. Of what use will a thing like this be to her in her altered position?—worse than useless. She can never wear it, and perhaps it may lead her into extravagance." She closed the case, and replaced it on the mantelpiece. She walked to the window, and looked out on the terrace. No one was moving about; the door was standing ajar, and she opened it, but the hall was empty. For one moment she hesitated, then closed the door, and once more examined the little article of jewellery. Presently she said "They'll never miss it in the confusion that will ensue. Someone might steal it. I'll take it home and save it for her until she will be in a position to wear it, which is not likely ever to be. If I die before that time, I'll leave it her in my will."

And she placed it in her pocket, and quietly walked upstairs.

When she reached Constance's room, she found the nurse asleep in the armchair before the fire; Constance was lying quiet and pale, with the baby on her breast. She smiled when she saw her mother, and directed the old woman's eyes towards the little fellow, who was sleeping quietly in his mother's arms. This sight one would have thought sufficient to soften any heart. But mamma was there for a purpose. She had been quietly told in that very room, that her company was not wanted. She knew she had robbed her daughter and her daughter's husband, and she hated them both for it. She had abused them, and backbitten them, and told all manner of uncharitable lies concerning them, and she hated them for that. We always do hate people we have ill-used. We can never forgive them for having trespassed against them. She had trespassed against every one in that house, and she consequently hated every one in that house. And now ruin had overtaken them, should she hold her hand? When our friends are prosperous and happy, we would not lay a feather's weight on them. But turn the tables. Let Care mount the saddle behind them, and we set to with a will to stone them. And she had come to stone her daughter and her son-in-law. Her old heart, in which the devil had set up his abiding place, was calling "strike! strike! and spare not." And she would strike. She would smite them hip and thigh, and when that was done, she would wash her hands of them for ever, or until Tom made or succeeded to another fortune.

And then she began. She did not even kiss her daughter. "Well! she said, "of course you've not heard the news, and so I've come to tell you. A nice mess you've made of your marriage. I always warned you against it, but it was of no use. Now don't interrupt me," she added, as Constance asked faintly what she meant. "Don't interrupt me, or that upstart of a husband of yours may be coming in before I can finish. You'll have to leave here, my dear, whether you think so or not. As to that Mr. Seedly, that bankrupt swindler, you must cut him altogether. Fortunately, the Moat and the farm are settled on you; but he can give you no more, so the connection had better cease. You must send him about his business, and perhaps he may get a place as a clerk or something. That must be done, for there's nothing whatever to be gained by keeping him on with you. And I'm come to tell you a piece of my mind, before I wash my hands of you and yours. You are a bad, good-for-nothing child, and always were. You have married, against my wishes, a fellow for whom I have the utmost contempt, the mean, pitiful creature. I ——"

"Mamma!" gasped Constance, clasping her baby to her breast, and fearing some evil; "mamma! what do you mean?"

"I mean," the old woman replied, elevating her harsh voice and glaring at her daughter, "that your husband is a vile impostor and a pauper; yes, a pauper, and you're a pauper, and that squalling brat is a pauper, and as such I wash my hands of you."

Constance had fixed her eyes on her mother, as though she could not understand what she was

saying. Then, when the truth dawned on her, and she saw the old woman meant that they were ruined, she rose up from the bed hurriedly, and with her child in her arms stood on the carpeted floor, her face all white and pinched with her illness, and her eyes wild with fright and terror. "It's untrue, mother! say it's untrue!" she said.

"It is not untrue," the old woman replied. "You are at this minute a pauper and a beggar."

Tom and Mr. Seedly coming in at that moment, found Constance lying fainting on the floor, with her baby still clasped to her breast, and the old woman looking rather frightened.

"Woman! woman!" the lad said, as he lifted his wife in his arms, and laid her tenderly in the bed, "this is your doing. Why do you come here at this moment?"

"Why do I come here," she replied, recovering her courage for the moment. "To tell your wife that she's a pauper. You! you proud upstart! You to deny my right to nurse my own child! I spit upon you, you beggar, you impostor, you pauper."

"Will you leave the room?" asks the lad quietly. "Here, nurse, hand me a restorative. She's faint again. Uncle, will you remove that woman. Her presence contaminates the room. As long as she is present, I'm certain my wife cannot recover."

Mr. Seedly put his hands on the old harridan's shoulder, and thrust her out of the door. "By God!" he whispered in her ear, "if anything happens to Constance, I will swear you killed her."

She became rather alarmed when she heard Tom tell the nurse to send the groom off at once for the

doctor, and she sat herself down outside the bed-room, with her handkerchief to her face. If anything should happen, how should she have known that Constance would have been such a fool as to jump out of bed like that within a week after her trouble? Was she to blame if she had failed to take things quietly? and as to what Mr. Seedly said, it was cruel! cruel!

In the meantime Tom was hanging over his wife in an agony of dread. She scarcely breathed now. He applied restoratives to her lips continually; but the fainting continued. The sudden motion of rising from her bed, combined with the effects of what her mother had told her, was too much for her strength. The blood had been driven back into her heart, and her strength was not sufficient to set that heart at work again. Presently she moved her lips, and Tom bent his ear to her to listen. She could scarcely articulate the words. "I'm cold, dear," she whispered. "There is a cold hand on my heart. I cannot see you. I am so sorry, love, for your misfortunes. Forgive me, dear, for the unhappiness I have caused you." Then she was silent for some few minutes, during which the nurse and Mr. Seedly were sobbing at the foot of the bed. Tom's tears were all dried up. His brain and heart seemed scorched and withered. After a time she opened her eyes, which were becoming glazed, and whispered, so low that he could scarcely hear her, "Place baby in my arms, Tom!" He laid the little fellow tenderly on her arm. "Now kiss me, dear. Let me hold your hand. I cannot see you. Good-bye, kiss ——"

The words which were on her lips remained unspoken. She was dead.

Tom rose up from his knees with a parched tongue, and hot, burning eyes, while the nurse closed the eyes of his dead wife, and opening the door of the chamber of death, he took the old woman who had remained outside, by the hand, and led her unresisting into the room. Drawing the sheet from off her daughter's face, he said, in hard, grating tones, "Look, ma'am, on *your* work. Now go, and take your evil heart from this roof, and tell the world you are a murderer, that you have murdered your own child."

She left the house, friendless and childless, with the stain of a great crime on her. She had gone there for the satisfaction of her revenge. She left it what Tom told her she was. And she went home to her solitary and cold hearth on which the holy fires of love and affection would never burn again, cursing God, and all things made after his likeness.

When the undertaker's men came, with the mutes, and jovial mourners, they carried out two coffins,—one that of a little child,—and Constance and her baby were laid in one grave. The child had survived it's mother two days. At the end of that time, Tom found himself a widower, childless, and poor.

CHAPTER XI.

After the undertaker's men had left the house of mourning, the auctioneer and *his* men came, and the catalogues were made and the bills posted, and all their household gods were brought to the hammer. As soon as Mr. Seedly's losses were known, you may be sure every one to whom he owed money sent in their little accounts, with an unmistakeable intimation that whoever else lost their money they expected to be paid. And though none of these bills were of very great amount, yet in the aggregate they amounted to a considerable sum, taking almost all the proceeds of the sale to liquidate them. But though Mr. Seedly had now nothing left, or scarcely anything, Tom was sole possessor of The Moat and the farm, for having survived both his wife and child the trust fell in, and he became the unrestricted proprietor. He also succeeded to the thousand pounds which had been Constance's fortune.

The day after the funeral Mr. Seedly and Tom were talking over the future, when the former referred to this money. "It was fortunate," he said, "that the money was settled on their joint lives.

Had it not been, Mrs. Revell would have taken it, and everything else she could lay her hands on."

"She thinks she has a right to it as it is," Tom replied. "That woman's avarice and greed are such that she would not wait until her daughter was laid in the grave before she inquired after this money. A letter was given me yesterday, before—before we left the house, from her on the subject. Here it is. "You and your uncle imposed on me in the first instance by representing yourselves as men of fortune, when you were but beggars," she says. "Under this belief, I consented, much against my better judgment, to receive you into my family, and my daughter's fortune was settled on her and her children, and on you, should you unhappily, and I say unhappily advisedly, survive them. You procured my consent to that clause by false pretences, and you cannot think of enforcing it under present circumstances. Indeed, no court of law in the land would hold that clause good, for I have, as I may say, taken legal opinion on the matter. If, therefore, you have the slightest pretensions to the name of a gentleman, or that of an honest man, you will immediately on receipt of this, send me the thousand pounds of which I have been defrauded. Should you fail to do so, I shall consult my solicitor."

Mr. Seedly was too much crushed by the calamities of the past week to become angry. His face, it is true, flushed for an instant, and then became as pale as before. "What do you intend doing?" he asked.

"I have already instructed your solicitor to return the money to her," Tom replied. "I could never

bring myself to touch anything that had belonged to that woman. I would rather a hundred times starve, or enlist, or turn farm labourer, than use it or keep it."

"I think you are right Tom," the little man said. "You will be none the worse for your self-respect, although she has no more right to that money than I have."

This was a terrible time both to Tom and his uncle. As every person knows who has been well-nigh ruined, their friends and acquaintances vilified them, and spoke evil things of them, after the manner of friends and acquaintances. There seemed but few things too uncharitable to say of them. They were dishonest, had lived beyond their means, had helped to take in the public, and a great deal more to the same purpose. While Tom's mother-in-law went about the country speaking more bitterly of them than anyone else, and abusing poor Tom, and saying that he habitually ill-used her daughter, and had driven her to an early grave. They were now quietly dropped by the county people, or at least by those of the same stamp as the Bogeys, who, if they met them, would pass without seeing them, or look another way. Sir Thomas Oldacre and Lord Fillyoaks, it is true, were as kind to them, and paid them quite as much attention at the market town as ever they had done, and had expressed a hope that their misfortunes would not compel them to leave the neighbourhood. His lordship, who had preserved a perfect recollection of Tom on the night of the ball, even offered to procure him an appointment in the Civil Service, which the lad very wisely and thank-

fully declined. Mr. Bogey, however, did not look on their misfortunes in the same light. On the same day that his lordship expressed such interest in Tom's welfare, that young gentleman seeing the lad coming down the High Street, thought after all he had rather not meet him, and quietly slipped into the chemist's shop. Tom saw he was avoided, and some of the old humour began to show itself. When he came opposite Mr. Bogey's retreat, he stepped across and went after him. "I saw you step in here, Bogey!" he said. "I thought I would come in after you. Some might suppose you intended avoiding me, but that can hardly be."

"Well, I don't know about that," Mr. Bogey had said, with considerable confusion. "You're well enough, old feller, and all that, you know. Now I don't want to hurt your feelings, because you've been hit hard lately; but circumstances alter cases, don't you see! and as, after all, you're not a county man, why of course you're not, you know. And such being the case, old feller, you must excuse me if we're not quite so friendly as we used to be when you had no end of tin and were a county man, and all that, you know."

"Then, perhaps under the circumstances to which you allude, it will be convenient for you to repay me that little loan," Tom observed.

"Then I'm sorry to say you're mistaken, old feller," Mr. Bogey replied, as he prepared to leave the shop. "I've consulted my brother the baronet, you know, and he says that everything you have will be swallowed up by the creditors of the bank, and that you were done up, rump and stump. Yes, by

Jove, them's his own words, rump and stump. And Bill is a deuced clever chap, as of course a member is expected to be. Such being the case, old feller, I don't owe you the money at all, and of course I must refuse to pay it to you, very much against my wishes. When your creditors apply to me for it, why I hope they may get it. Good-bye, old feller! I'm deuced sorry and all that, but as you're not a county man after all, why don't you see ——?" And Mr. Bogey went his way, having acted according to his light.

But if some of those who had courted them in the days of their prosperity, and eaten their dinners, and borrowed their money, turned the cold shoulder on them when they were no longer prosperous, there were others who stood by them in the days of their adversity. Among these were Mr. and Mrs. Maggs, and Sam. When the sale was over, and Mr. Seedly and Tom took up their quarters in the bailiff's cottage until they had determined what course to pursue in the future, Mr. Maggs and his wife paid them a visit of condolence. They could not see Tom, whom they loved as their own son, suffer, without suffering themselves. "Mother and me is wery, wery grieved," Mr. Maggs said. "Two misfortins, or three we may say, comin' one atop the other, is enough to knock any man out of time. But we are all in His hands, and whatever He sends us is for the best."

"All for the best, if we could only see it!" Mrs. Maggs put in.

"Certain'y," Mr. Maggs continued. "If we could only see it. And there's the mischief! We don't always see it at the time. And if not, why

not? Because our natural feelings cloud our understandings. But time will heal wounded 'arts, and mend damaged fortins."

"I trust it may!" Tom replied. "As you once told me, all of us have our burdens to bear, and we must bear ours as best we may. We are no worse off than hundreds of others. The only thing that grieves me in our altered fortunes is that my uncle will feel the change."

"No, no!" said the little man. "I've lived my day and had my shot. You were just about to commence your innings, and it falls harder on you than on me."

"But you can commence again!" Mr. Maggs remarked. "Tom is young yet, wery young as we may say, and you can't be wery old, Sir. Not older than me, I should say. And I feel game enough to begin again this minute, if I was down. Oh, you'll do, Sir, I warrant. You do the planning and scheming, and Tom the rough work, and I'll lay a pound you'll come right in no time. Won't they, mother?"

"Of course they will!" mother replies.

"Wery well, then," continued Mr. Maggs. "Now them there burdens of yours are wery stiff 'uns to carry, and you'll ache pretty hard afore you've done with 'em. Now mother and me think as praps we may lighten 'em a bit, don't we, mother?"

"Certain'y Samwel!" Mrs. Maggs replied. "If so be as we can help a bit, we're game to do it."

"And we're game to do it," Mr. Maggs repeated, with much admiration of his wife's way of putting it. "We are, and there's no mistake about them

words. But how can we do it? that's the pint. I expect you'll not be stopping about here, for you'd be wery uncomfortable having to play second fiddle after playing first. Now, how about th' brass? We hear as you've lost all your bit o' money. If so, you'll want some more to begin again on. You can't do without a bit o' money, you know, in these 'ere days. You're bound to have it. Now, how about it? that's the pint."

"My dear Mr. Maggs," Tom replied, "I know your goodness of heart, and what brought you here. But we must disappoint you. We have still the house and farm left to us, which will be worth about ten thousand pounds. You see we shall not want capital to start on."

"Ten thousand pound is a sight o' money!" Mr. Maggs said, looking at the same time, as Tom imagined, slightly disappointed at their being above requiring help. "A heap o' money; I thought it was wery much worser than that. But if I may make so bold, what do you intend doing with it? Three or four hundred a year won't be much for you two after your hunting, a-going about, and enjoying of yourselves. You couldn't make it do, any way. Then what are you a-going to do with that ten thousand pounds? Perhaps you'll take a business! If so, may be you'll want a little more!"

"I think not," Mr. Seedly replied. "I believe we shall be able to raise sufficient money by mortgaging the house and farm—which you know are Tom's, for I have nothing—to commence the new life we intend entering on. But at the same time, my dear Maggs, we must both ever feel grateful to you

for your kindness. I, on my own part, must say that I value your friendship and that of your wife as much as I value anything in this world. As for Tom, I know he looks on you in the light of his parents, for you have given him the love and care of parents. But we shall need no assistance, I hope. We have been talking over our affairs to-day, and are both of one mind. Had you not come here to-day, we should have seen you to-morrow to tell of you our determination."

"Then you've made up your minds!" Mr. Maggs said.

"Yes!" the little man replied. "We have made up our minds. We shall leave England, for Tom understands nothing of business, and I'm afraid I have not nerve enough left to stand up against the chances and risks that are continually being run in the only business *I* understand. You have heard us speak of Mr. Eversley, Tom's uncle, in Australia! He has made a large fortune there as a sheep farmer, and we have determined to go out to him, and to commence as sheep farmers too. Many considerations have induced us to come to this conclusion. With the capital Tom can put into the business, backed up by his uncle's experience, he is sure in time to make a fortune, though perhaps I may not live to see it. Then the life is a healthy one, and he can still enjoy something like the sport he has become used to. That consideration weighed somewhat heavily with *me*. I don't think I could live in a town again, and I could not live happily in the country without a horse. My days may not be many, for I'm getting on in life; but what there are

remaining to me, I think can be spent more happily there than here. And besides these considerations, I think the very fact of so great a distance separating us from this place will make our burdens lighter, and give us greater strength to bear them.

"It's a terrible long way off, aren't it?" Mrs. Maggs inquired, as she wiped her eyes; for the idea of her Tom leaving England, it might be for ever, made her heart sore."

"Yes, it is a long way off!" Tom replied, taking her hand. "But people return from there. When we have made our fortunes we shall return too, mother."

"Ay! I dunno about that," Mr. Maggs said, reflectively. "Sometimes they get to like the country and the new life so wery much that they forget altogether about home. Do you happen to know whether they have any chimblies out there?"

"I'm afraid not enough of them, in the part we shall go to, to establish a business," Mr. Seedly replied, smiling. "The country is immense, and the population few and far between at present.

"I'm sorry for that," Mr. Maggs said. "I've allays had an ankering arter foreign travel. Praps the language 'ud lick me, but I think I'd be in half a mind to try it, if there was business to be done out there in my line. Why, what's to prewent me and mother, and Sam, and our Polly, from all going? Dash it all, I've 'arf a mind to have a shy myself! We haven't got ten thousand pound, but we've saved a goodish bit, and we might do summut in the sheep line ourselves. What d'ye say, mother?"

Mother declared "she didn't care a brass farden.

She wasn't afeared of the warter, and that if Orstraliar couldn't be brought to Hulme Terrace, they could take Hulme Terrace to Orstraliar. On'y let Sam say he'll go, and off we starts."

"Wery good!" said Mr. Maggs, approvingly. "You see, mother's game, and when mother says a thing, mother means it. Now look here," he continued, as he edged his chair a little closer to Mr. Seedly's. "You can muster ten thousand. That's a heap o' money. We can't do that, but we've got two thousand seven hundred and odd in the Bank, which mayn't be enough to start ourselves in the sheep trade, but quite enough to jine! Wery well, then. Aren't we brothers all? Am I a man? Yes. Am I a brother? Certain'y, though sometimes black. Wery well! let's jine. Ten thousand and two thousand seven hundred makes nearly thirteen thousand. Wery well! Certain'y! Brothers all it is."

"No! no!" Mr. Seedly exclaimed, when he perceived the drift of Mr. Maggs. "It will never do. Your son would not consent to throw up his engagements to enter on what is but a speculation after all. If he remains at home, his future and his fortune are both certain. You could not ask him to throw over all his prospects, and you could never go without him. You must give up this thought, Maggs. It comes from your heart, and not from your head. Besides, there's Polly, who is quite a daughter to you. She must remain at school for a year or two yet. We can manage to pay for that, you know. And when we come home again"—and the little man looked as though he thought his chance of ever returning was exceedingly small—"you will be

able to meet us with a happy welcome. It would be an awful thing to return and no one waiting for us, and we expecting no one. Why, Maggs, I don't think under those circumstances we ever should come back again. Here you must remain, if only that our hearts may point to you, and whisper sometimes 'Home, sweet home.'"

Mr. Maggs remained silent for a long time. If Sam wasn't a genius, he thought, he'd go too. He *would* like to go to "Australiar," where all the gold came from. But then it was very true what Mr. Seedly said, that if their friends did not remain at home, home would be home to them no longer. He did not think, until everything was settled, that they could carry "home" with them. He was disappointed too, not that they were so well able to start afresh in life, but that he and Mrs. Maggs would have no opportunity of helping them. He would have liked to have counted out all he was worth in sovereigns in Tom's hat—to have the feeling in his heart that *he* was helping to make a man of him. But then ten thousand pound was such a heap of money, they could do almost anything. But, perhaps, if they had a thousand or so more they would be able to start in a larger way, and thus save a few years of labour. With this thought in his mind he said, "I s'pose them sheep businesses are all sizes! Some of 'em five thousand pounders, and some perhaps even twenty thousand pounders."

"Yes, they are of all sizes," Mr. Seedly replied. "You can set up a station for five thousand, or buy one for as much as a hundred thousand."

"Then, look here!" Mr. Maggs said. "Let's

jine! Mother and me can stop home to welcome you back again. But what o' that? You can take the money with you, and buy a twelve thousand pounder. Then let's jine!"

After considerable discussion they were able to persuade Mr. Maggs that his place was to remain in Hulme Terrace, and that his money was better employed at home than in their hands. It was a hard task to persuade him that they did not want money; and he would probably have persisted in forcing a loan on them, had not Tom, in a moment of inspiration, suggested that it had better be looked on as a reserve fund in case of accidents. And with the promise that should they ever want assistance they would apply to him for it, he was obliged to remain content.

There was now nothing to keep them in England. They had made up their minds to go out to Mr. Robert Eversley, and to commence a new life as squatters. The present writer has every reason to believe that they were in no small measure influenced by that old letter of Mr. Eversley's, in which he spoke of the sport to be had there. "We can't expect to see such horses out there as we do at home, and we may miss the scarlet coats at cover; but your uncle says a good kangaroo hunt is no bad substitute for a fox hunt, and he is as good a judge as most men. And besides that, Tom, there's one thing that weighs a good deal with me —there are no fences. Men of my age and shape don't care about riding at fences like you young ones."

And so they engaged their cabins on board the

North Star, which was to sail from the port of London on the third of November. It was the last week in October now, so they packed their portmanteaus, laid in a stock of tooth-brushes and soap, and took their breechloaders and a revolver each, and after bidding a sad farewell to their friends in Hulme Terrace, during which many tears were shed on both sides, they set off for London. They did not go to an hotel, but at Sam's earnest solicitation put up with him. That little loan he had from Tom had escaped his recollection; but now that his friends were no longer rich, Sam, with many blushes and thanks, and apologies for having allowed it to run on so long, honourably discharged the debt.

Tom knew the secrets of his heart too well to call on Marion until the last moment. It was no moment for love when he had but just buried his wife and child. And yet he knew that were he to be with her, to see her, to speak to her, his love would escape from his eyes, if not from his lips. And he had no right, he thought, to love her. He had played his game, and the score had been against him. But he must see her once more—must bid her farewell. The task would be a bitter one, but he must do it. He put it off until the evening before the *North Star* sailed. With misery not unmixed with hope in the future in his heart, he once more stood in the little room in Northumberland Street. Marion had of course heard of his bereavement, and of the alteration in his prospects. Even had she not heard, the appearance of the lad would have told her he had passed through severe trials. He was dressed in black, and a crape band

was about his hat. His face had lost the rich brown colour which had been there in the old days, and his eyes had a wistful dreamy look, as though he were looking away into the future. And Marion, too, was altered. From the high-spirited girl she had been, she had toned down into a gentle woman. She took his hand when he entered, and led him to a seat.

"You have been severely tried, Tom," she said; "and I have grieved for you. You know that what would cause you pain, would also pain me." And she blushed faintly as she spoke. "But you are going away," she continued, after a moment's pause. "Perhaps we may nev—never see each other again."

He remained silently looking at her. He seemed as though he had heard no word she had spoken, but was lost in the past, or struggling far away in the future. Indeed, he was both. His mind carried him back to his boyhood, and he saw himself again unfettered, unbound, knowing nothing of that world in which he had been wrecked—of that strife from out of which he was struggling, bruised and bent. And then his mind carried him away into the unknown realms of the future. But here there was but one thought, one hope. And that thought he must never harbour—that hope he must smother. He had played his game, he told himself, and lost.

And then he came back to the object of his visit. He remembered he had called to wish her good-bye, —to wish her farewell. What a volume of meaning is in that one word, farewell! It means "Evermore;" it means "Nevermore." Evermore he

must love her: nevermore would he see her, or look into those deep, fathomless eyes. And in that there was surely misery enough. He looked once more into her eyes. Alas! nevermore! Alas! evermore! He drew from his finger the emerald ring Mr. Seedly had given him, and placed it on her finger. "Wear this for me, dear!" he sighed. "Think sometimes of me, as I shall ever think of you."

"Evermore!" she whispered, as her breath came quicker and with more difficulty. "Evermore!"

"And now, farewell!" he said. "Let me press you but once, dear, in my arms; let me give you but one kiss before I go." And he opened his arms to her; and she looked up at him, and saw a glorious smile on his white handsome face; and she threw herself on his breast, and wrapped her arms round his neck, and interlocked her long lithe fingers, and pressed her lips against his. She was all a woman now.

"Good-bye, my dear!" he presently said once more. "Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!" and he disengaged himself from her embrace, and went out.

Then she flung herself on her knees before the door of the little room, and with uplifted, clasped hands, she cried: "Oh, my darling! my darling! my darling! come back to me, come back."

And a sigh was wafted upwards from the quiet street, as he made his way from the house in which he had left love and happiness. And the gusts of cold night air wafted it in at the open window, and it fell on her ear like a knell on her heart, and it said, "Nevermore! nevermore!"

CHAPTER XII.

One evening, towards the latter end of January, Mr. Robert Eversley was sitting under the verandah of his house, smoking his pipe. He was somewhat altered since we saw him last, now eighteen years ago. As he rises from his seat for a moment to call to an elderly-looking man, who was distinguished by a broken nose, and whom he addressed as "Chicken," we can see how time has dealt with him. He is still as tall and straight as ever, but carries less flesh, and has the appearance of being almost too thin. But the covering of his big frame is all muscle, as tough as whipcord. His face is of a good mahogany colour, clean shaven, all but the upper lip, which carries a heavy, short trimmed moustache, now tinged with grey. By his side sits Mrs. Eversley. The only alteration we can see in her is that her hair has become slightly silvered, and her form more matronly. She is still as handsome as ever, and old squatters, who have been in the colony for the last twenty years, even yet swear there never was a woman in the whole of Queensland fit to carry her shoes. On her lap sits a beautiful little girl of four years of age, while a sturdy lad,

about two years her senior, is swinging by the rail which runs round the verandah.

"I wish it would rain!" Mr. Eversley says presently. "We've had scarcely enough to cool the ground this season; and I'm afraid, if this dry weather lasts much longer, there'll be no keep left."

Mrs. Eversley glanced up at the blue cloudless sky, and then looked at her husband. "We must continue to hope for it, Bob," she observed. "It has been worse than this before, and things have come round."

"That's true enough, my dear," he said, taking his pipe from his mouth; "but still I wish we could have a couple of days' steady rain. Not the inverted waterspouts we get sometimes, for it would all run off; but some good steady rain, like they get at home."

Mrs. Eversley sighed. They had erected their family altar, and set up their household gods here years ago, and had suffered and rejoiced, and had children born to them, and yet at the word "home," their hearts turned towards that little speck on the world's map so many thousands of miles away.

Mr. Eversley heard his wife sigh, and went and sat beside her, and took their boy on his knee. "Home is home, after all, Jane. I know you think so, and so do I," he said. "And yet I should not like to say I would exchange this life for the other! We've got elbow room here, and that's more than they can say in England. There's your brother Arthur, now! I daresay he thinks his estate of a thousand acres or so rather extensive; and yet a man here with only that quantity of land

would consider there was scarcely room for a kitchen garden. Then, again, the climate at home can't be compared with this, though the heat is tremendous. How did you manage to stand it to-day, Jane? By Jove, it *was* hot, and draughting cattle isn't a cool job."

"It might be a good deal worse, Bob," Mrs. Eversley replied. "I think, if our friends were only with us, I could look on this as home. But home is where our friends are."

"Our friends are not many out of the colony," he said. "There's my sister and her husband down at Stowe, and your brother and his family, and I think we've finished them. There was poor old Silas; but I've not heard from him, or of him, for many years. The chances are he's dead, I should say." And then he smoked on for a considerable time in silence, thinking, probably, of those days when he and Mr. Seedly were bosom friends, and of the great mistake they once made. Mrs. Eversley saw that his mind was busy with the past, and did not interrupt him until the day was dying into night, and the brief moments of twilight came on. Then she rose up, and placing her hand on her husband's arm, said, "Come, Bob; the little ones are fast asleep, and the dew is falling. It is time we went in."

"So it is, Jane," he replied. "By Jove, I was deep in the past then, and—Hollo! Who comes here?"

As he spoke, they saw two men riding their jaded horses, and leading another, which carried their bags, towards the house. The horses appeared to

be done up, and the riders, riding with their feet out of their stirrups, seemed as tired as their animals. It was too dark now to distinguish their faces, but one appeared to be considerably above the average size, and the other rather under. When they came within twenty yards of the house, Mr. Eversley heard one say, "Ask them what station this is, Tom. By the Lord, I'm about done up! Another week of this work, and I should knock under; and my throat is as dry as a limeburner's jacket."

"New chums, I expect," Mr. Eversley whispered to his wife.

Then a clear ringing voice called out, "I say! anybody there? What station is this? and can you put us up for the night?"

"This is Tangaboora. Hang your cattle to the rail, until I can send a man to them, and come up."

"Then does Mr. Robert Eversley live here still?"

"Yes," replied that gentleman.

"Hurrah! we're at home, then! Hold up, you beggar! You nearly had me off, then. Here, Tom, jump off, and tie them up." And in another moment Mr. Seedly had scrambled off his horse and mounted the verandah. "Ah! Bob; I know you now! I wonder I did not recognise your voice when you first spoke. But, then, it is so many years since you left home. How are you, old fellow? Lord! what a blessing we've come to the end of our journey!" And the little man grasped the hand of his old friend, and began to shake it as though he never intended leaving off.

For one moment Mr. Eversley seemed uncertain whether he knew his guest or not. But only for one

moment. Before the little man had ceased speaking he brought his heavy hand down on Mr. Seedly's shoulder, and burst into a great laugh. "By heavens!" he said, "if it isn't little Silas himself. Here, Jane! Jane! come here. Here's the very man we were just speaking about. Well! well! this *is* an unexpected happiness! But tell your friend to step up. Come on in. By Jove, we'll have a night of it. But I'll send a man to look after the nags." And raising his voice he called out, "Chicken! Chicken! just take these gentlemen's nags to the stable, and look for saddle galls."

"All right, boss," the Chicken replied.

By this time Tom had swung himself on to the verandah. Mr. Eversley went to him, and shaking his hand said, "Welcome, sir, to Tangaboora. Your friend is a very old friend of mine; and I say again, welcome to Tangaboora."

"He does not know me," thought Tom. "I suppose I must wait until I am properly vouched for." So he replied to his uncle's welcome, "Thank you, sir, I am glad we have arrived. Our cattle are about done up, and I don't think we could have proceeded farther, at least for some days." And then he followed Mr. Eversley to the sitting-room of the house. Mr. Seedly was sitting in an American chair, with Mrs. Eversley's little girl on his knee. "I don't know that ever I was so glad to see anyone before," he said; "to tell the truth, I had had just enough of it. For the last three weeks I've been baked until there's scarcely anything left of me. The heat has been tremendous, though I will say it appears to have dealt tenderly with you, ma'am. I

can see scarcely any change in you, from what I remember you years ago. However much the men may have cause to grumble, I really think the ladies have none. But here is Bob, and my—my companion." And the little man began to chuckle.

Now although Tangaboora was some hundreds of miles from Brisbane, it must not be supposed it was devoid of all comfort or even elegance. When Mr. Eversley had erected his timber mansion, he did it with the hope that Jane Kelmarsh would, perhaps, some day live in it. The result was that it combined comfort with beauty. After he had brought his wife home, the presence of a lady was soon felt. Many little elegancies appeared which would have been superfluous in a bachelor's home. Every room in the living part of the house opened into the large airy hall, and out on to the verandah. The hall was used as a dining-room, and was panelled in cedar. It ran the whole length of the house, one end of it being occupied by a billiard table. All the other rooms were either panelled or papered. The supporters of the verandah had rudely-carved capitals, and were entwined by beautiful, flowering creepers. There were gardens attached to the house, in which were growing oranges, lemons, citrons, figs, olives, peaches, pine-apples, and other fruits. The room in which Mr. Seedly was sitting was elegantly fitted up. A grand piano stood at one end of the room, and the walls were covered with water-colour paintings. There was no carpet, but the floor was polished to such an extent that it was almost dangerous to strange feet. Two large and handsome oil lamps were burn-

ing, throwing a perfect light on every object in the room.

"My dear," said Mr. Eversley, "this is Mr. Seedly's friend; and I am sure that any friend of Silas is welcome to Tangaboora."

Tom was standing close behind Mr. Eversley, in the door. Never was there a stronger likeness between two men, allowing for difference of age, than between them. Take five-and-twenty years off Mr. Eversley's shoulders, and you saw him in Tom. Mrs. Eversley saw this wonderful likeness in a moment. So great was its effect upon her that she forgot the duties of hospitality. She rose from her seat, and never once taking her eyes from the lad, said, pointing to him with her finger, "Bob! who is this—this gentleman?"

"Beyond that he is Silas' friend, I really can't say," he replied. Then turning to Tom, he continued, "My friend, Mr. Seedly has— Well! upon my soul, this is strange!"

"Very!" said Tom, who, though prepared for seeing a resemblance between himself and his uncle, was not prepared for seeing so great a resemblance as this.

Mr. Seedly was the only one not confounded. He sprang from his chair, chuckling and rubbing his hands in great glee. "Isn't that Bob, as he was twenty years ago, ma'am?" he said. "Do you believe in doubles, in ghosts, or in wraiths? Isn't he Bob's double? Isn't he the ghost of twenty years ago? That ghost—and a big ghost, too, as you see, ma'am—has haunted me now for five years. He has sat at table with me, and we have taken our

wine together. Fancy dining with a ghost! Ha! ha! I'm fond of ghosts, I am. Oh! I like a good hearty ghost. But I will keep you no longer in suspense. That lad, whose likeness to you, Bob, has confounded you all, is Tom Burton, and I leave your own heart to say whether he has any claim to your love."

"Burton!" exclaimed Mr. Eversley, and the whole memory of the past rushed on him. "Sir," he continued after a moment's pause, "you must be the son of my poor sister Clara. Jane, this must be my nephew. Welcome! a hundred times welcome! nephew. I never thought to have had the happiness ever to see you in this world." And he would very likely have embraced him had it not occurred to him that, two great fellows as they were, it would have appeared ridiculous. But Mrs. Eversley kissed him on both cheeks, and welcomed him for her husband's sake.

"I believe I am your nephew, sir," Tom replied. "My father was Captain Thomas Burton, and he died in the West Indies. I can scarcely recollect him. My mother I do recollect, although she died when I was very young. Mr. Seedly has her portrait, and he says she was your sister. Beyond this, you must take me on trust."

"Your resemblance to my family, nephew, would convince me of our relationship," Mr. Eversley said; "but if Silas recognised the portrait of your mother as that of my sister, there can be no doubt of it, for no one remembers her better than he."

"Indeed, that's true!" sighed the little man. "No one remembers what she was better than I.

And he is *her* son, Bob." And then he sighed again; but, after a moment's pause, continued in a more cheerful manner: "But now we are at home, Bob—you will allow us to say at home, for, by Gad, I haven't forgotten the invitation you gave me ten years ago, and, as to Tom, he comes on the strength of his relationship—now we are at home, to say nothing of the hospitality of the bush, why, we'll just make ourselves comfortable. A bucket of water and a sponge will put us to rights, and then we can have a long talk over our pipes afterwards."

"Come along, Silas; come, nephew. Our houses in the bush are not as large as some at home, but we can always find room for a stranger, while you are of our own blood," said Mr. Eversley, leading the way into another room. "You must remember, however, you are not at The Moat now, and will have to rough it a bit."

"If the glimpse we have seen here is a specimen of the way you rough it," replied the little man, "I think we shall be able to rub along. I even fancy I shall like roughing it. Do you think you will be able to exist, Tom, in a house where there is a grand piano, and everything to match?"

"The house is well enough, or, at least, it supplies our wants," Mr. Eversley laughed. "But you must remember, Silas, we have no society nearer than a dozen miles, and there's plenty of rough work, and hard work, on a station."

"It will suit Tom, for he is big enough, and strong enough, and young enough, to work hard," replied the little man, pulling off his coat. "As for myself, perhaps it will suit me too, and reduce

some of my fat. I'm tubby, Bob, at present, though not quite so bad as I was when I left home."

"Then we breakfast at six in the morning. How will you like that, Silas? I remember you used to be fond of bed," said Mr. Eversley, laughing.

"We'll manage it!" the little man replied, preparing to plunge his head into the water. "It is so deuced hot in the daytime that morning and evening appear to me to be the only time one can move without melting. I shall make an excellent early riser."

"But how will you manage without your fox-hunting?" continued Mr. Eversley.

"Kangaroos!" sputtered the little man from under the water. "I recollect all about it, and we'll save you no end of money as shepherds or stockmen, or the deuce knows what; for we mean to go in for it strong, preparatory to having a station of our own. But we'll tell you our plans by-and-by."

When they returned to the hall, which served as a dining-room, the table was laid for their dinner or supper, whichever meal they chose to call it. There was every delicacy to be obtained in the colony, and a profusion of light and flowers, and a pretty fair display of plate. A couple of large kangaroo hounds lay just outside on the verandah, sleepily watching the mistress of the house, while a cockatoo, in the most brilliant scarlet plumage, had perched itself on the rail.

"This dish does your cook credit, Mrs. Eversley," said the little man. "What do you call it?"

"The colonial name is 'steamer,'" that lady replied. "It is kangaroo tail."

"It is delicious!" said the little man. "I think I shall hunt kangaroo pretty often. What a zest fox-hunting would have if one could only cook and eat the brush. Many a fellow who thinks of nothing but his dinner would then ride hard. Just fancy, when you come home after a long day, having ox-tail soup at one end of the table and fox-tail at the other. Your kangaroo must be a most excellent animal! But, Bob, who's your wine-merchant?"

"That is colonial wine," replied Mr. Eversley, with a laugh. "You won't like it at first; but cultivate the taste, Silas. I can warrant it is not doctored, and that is more than you can say of the wines you get at home."

When the cloth was removed, they produced their pipes, and sat far into the night, talking of the past and the probabilities of the future. Mr. Seedly told them as much of Tom's life as he thought proper to tell in the lad's presence, and of his own fall from wealth to comparative poverty. He spoke of what he had planned and had hoped for: of how he had intended making Tom a county man, and how he had failed. "And now," said the little man, "we commence life again. It is late for me, I know; but as long as I have my boy with me, I have youth and strength. I am only a little over fifty yet, and perhaps, by the time I am seventy, Tom and I will be able to go back again, and realise the dream I had. It is a long while to look forward to, I know; but in this country, they tell me, a man can live as long as he likes, almost, and seventy is considered the prime of life. And, indeed, Bob, I begin to believe it, for you are as good a man, to

all appearances, as you were twenty years ago; and as to Mrs. Eversley, she has positively grown younger."

"I see that, in coming to a new country, you have brought some of the habits of the old with you," said Mrs. Eversley, smiling. "You have not forgotten the way to flatter since you have been in Queensland."

"Indeed, ma'am," replied the little man, wagging his head, "truth is sometimes the greatest flattery. This is a young country, and everything in it appears youthful. Your institutions are young, your people are young. I have not seen an old man or woman since we have been in it. And, Bob"—and he winked his eye on his old friend as he continued—"your wine is young! But let us hope that age will improve all—especially the wine!"

"I hope so! Time will have been badly spent if we and everything we have do not improve," said Mr. Eversley, laughing. Every time he looked at his old friend, he could scarcely repress his laughter. The little man's round form and red face were very suggestive of merriment. And then his thoughts would carry him back to the time when he presented quite a different figure—a time when the fat, tubby little man had been a slim young dandy. And then he continued: "It may seem rather soon to ask you, Silas, what plans you and my nephew had formed for your guidance when you left home, but in my opinion we can never lay hold of the main thing too soon, for a variety of reasons. If we come to an understanding at once, we shall be less likely to let a chance escape us."

"Well," replied the little man, "I was coming to that. You know, when I dropped all my fortune, Tom had The Moat and the farm still. Neither of us much fancied the prospect of farming about a hundred acres or so of land for a living, to say nothing of our desire to leave the neighbourhood, which had witnessed our altered fortunes. The place is worth ten thousand pounds, and I would have had Tom sell it right out; but young people are very sanguine, Bob, and he hopes we shall pull ourselves straight again, and should we do so, we might fancy to return there. So the place was mortgaged for seven thousand, and with the sale of the farm stock, we have about nine thousand pounds. With this we hope to be able to enter on sheep and cattle farming, and it is for this purpose we are here. We know, Bob, that you will help us with your experience and advice, and as the expenses of a couple of young bachelors"—and here the little man laughed very heartily—"cannot be very great where there are no temptations to spend money, we hope in time to become rich again."

"Nine thousand pounds is not much to buy a station with," Mr. Eversley said. "Stations of any consequence range from twenty thousand to two hundred thousand pounds. There's Donovan's place to be sold. He wants twenty-five thousand pounds for it, and it joins us. It would be pleasant to us to have you as neighbours, and I think, nephew, we could arrange about the money. I could advance you what you would require, and there would be no need to go to the banks."

"Thank you, uncle!" Tom replied. "I am very

grateful for your offer, but if I may express an opinion, I would rather we did not begin in debt. What do you think, uncle Silas?"

"Gad! I think you are right, Tom!" the little man replied, after a moment's reflection. "I don't like commencing under a load, even when the indebtedness is to a friend. Could we not start a new station Bob, with the money we have?"

"Certainly!" Mr. Eversley said; "but in that case you would have to rough it in earnest, for some time at least. All the good pasture land in this part is already taken up, so you would have to go farther into the interior for your land, and perhaps, run risks with the blacks. Besides that, we should be at a great distance from each other, and as for any benefit or pleasure we should gain from each other's society, you might as well have remained in England. I think, nephew, that under the circumstances you had better be guided by me, and although I must commend your determination not to commence under a debt, yet I think you may give way when the loan comes from your mother's brother. What do you say, Jane?"

"I think," she replied, looking kindly on her husband's nephew, "he cannot possibly do better than put himself unreservedly in your hands. At present he knows nothing of the colony, and you have been here for many years, and must be better able to judge of what is best for him and Mr. Seedly."

"You hear what my wife says, nephew," continued Mr. Eversley, "and she speaks to the point too. You know nothing of sheep or cattle, I imagine, and would be sure to have to pay considerably for

the experience you gain, unless you have some one near you to advise with. Now if you were to purchase Toowoomba, you would be comparatively near, for no one thinks a dozen miles or so much in this country. I think that Donovan would take considerably less than he is asking, for his flocks are not up to the average by any means. But it could soon be made a paying concern, if you bought cheap, and imported some high-class rams. At present, his brand has not the best name in the market, but an energetic man could alter all that. Another thing is, I am of opinion there is a considerable amount of mineral wealth on that station, although it would never do for me to tell him so. If there is, and you can localize it, you would have an opportunity of obtaining a mining lease. Mind, I do not say there is any mineral that would pay at present to be worked on that station, but I fancy there is. I am but a poor geologist, and a worse assayer; but as far as my judgment goes, I should say there was copper on that run in paying quantities."

"Is any permission required for one to make a slight inspection?" inquired Tom.

"None in the world. You can go botanizing or geologizing as the nearest doctor we have does. No one would question you," Mr. Eversley replied.

"Well then, uncle Silas," said Tom, "you remember that I learned something of chemistry with Mr. Drust, quite sufficient to assay minerals. Indeed, the object of my ambition then was to be attached to some mine in the capacity of assayer. I think we could not do better than get a few samples of the ore."

"Gad! I think you're right," the little man replied. And in a moment all his old commercial instincts were awakened, and he saw himself the promoter of a public company paying enormous dividends, and the three gentlemen there present the chief shareholders.

"Then, nephew, we'll get a sample for you, and in the meantime there is no hurry to make up your mind whether you will purchase or not," said Mr. Eversley. "Until you decide, you can begin to learn the duties, the anxieties, and the pleasures of a flock-master at Tangaboora."

CHAPTER XIV.

When Tom and Mr. Seedly landed at Brisbane, the former wrote to Mr. Maggs, and Sam, and Marion, giving them an account of the voyage, and stating that they were about to start for a long journey up the country, the destination of which he did not give. In his letter to Marion, he was careful not to give way in any manner to sentimentality, because he looked on that passion, at present, as almost hopeless. Marion was now one of the stars of the theatrical world, and could command a good position in life; and what was he, or what was his present position that he should bind her by promises to wait, perhaps, an indefinite period before he could ask her to be his wife? If she loved him as he believed she did, she would wait and hope. But he would not bind her by a promise to wait. Should the time come when he would be able to say, "Here, dear, I have made a position, I have secured a competence, which will justify my asking you to share it. Will you be my wife?" he would say it, should she at that time be free to accept him. But to secure that competence would in all probability take years of labour. And a few years in youth seem as ages, and in love an eternity. He would wait, and work, and

hope, but he would write no word which would draw an avowal or an implied promise from her. And so he sent home his letters, and waited for some months, hoping for replies, never thinking they could not reply to those letters by reason of his not having informed them where to send them. And then towards the close of that year—a long and weary year to those at home—he wrote again. These letters he entrusted to a stockman who was riding to Brisbane, and that gentleman, finding the society at a spirit store on the way too seductive, drank himself into an attack of delirium tremens, and destroyed the letters entrusted to him during one of his fits of madness.

When the time had come and passed that should have brought Tom news from home, and no news came, and the next mail had arrived and still no letters, he almost gave up hope. They had forgotten him already, he thought. His place at home was hardly cold, before they had ceased to think of him. And then better thoughts came. It was not possible that Mr. and Mrs. Maggs, who had loved him as their own son for so many years, should cease to love or remember him. And Sam, poor old Sam, was evidently hard worked in his profession, and had no time for letter writing. For Marion, he invented hundreds of excuses. It was not right she should correspond with him, who was so recently a widower, and who, when in the fulness of his good fortune, had failed to ask her to share that fortune. But when the time should come that he should again be on the winning side, then he would fly to her, then he would lay all at her feet. He was on his proba-

tion, he assured himself. He was serving an apprenticeship to happiness in the school of adversity. And so these fevers of hope and fear alternately took possession of him, and during the whole time he worked as his uncle had seen few young men work, and acquired anodyne and information as to his future business at the same time.

And while Tom was away on the Darling Downs, shepherding, yarding cattle, branding, and shearing, hoping and fearing, but always working, his friends at home were sick at heart about him. They had received his first letters, and in due time expected to hear again. Until that time came, they could not reply to his letter, although Sam had already begun to keep a diary of the sayings and doings of all with whom he came daily in contact, and which he entitled "The Diary of an Eminent Man," thinking in the goodness of his heart that such light and pleasant reading would perhaps enliven the hours his friend would be spending away in the bush. Sam, as well as his parents and Marion, and indeed a good many others, had peculiar notions respecting Australian life. They thought the bush was nothing but hundreds of miles of thickets and dense copse. They pictured him far away from any human habitation, with a shepherd's crook on his shoulder, in charge of several thousands of sheep, and with no other company than his dog, and perhaps any number of deadly snakes, enlivened occasionally by a visit from a party of natives, who, if they did not kill him, would at best be but unpleasant neighbours. These fancies gave Sam much food for speculation and poetry. His "Dying Shepherd to his Dog," he

thought really fine, and his "Dying Dog to his Master," exquisitely touching. The latter he took an opportunity of reading in the presence of his father and mother, to their great wonder and delight. Mr. Maggs said "he was blessed if he knew afore, as how a dorg could think such wery beautiful things, let alone say 'em, and he was blowed if it wasn't a wery fine thing to be a genus, and no mistake." They regularly took the *Times* newspaper now, and read the arrivals of ships and the mails with great assiduity. Perhaps, and they almost hoped it, he was sick of the country, and was on his way home again. But as time went on, they gave this thought up. Then some doubts crept into their minds as in Tom's, and they began to wonder whether distance can really separate hearts, and whether he had forgotten them. After much consideration and discussion in Hulme Terrace, this was condemned as being unworthy of both the Maggses and the Burtons. "No!" Mrs. Maggs solemnly said, "it aren't that, I'll go bail. Wasn't he to us as our own, for ever so many years? Didn't he call you father, and me mother, the blessed dear; and didn't he punch that wicked capting's head until he hanged himself? and is it likely as he would forget us now? No, Samwel. If he was a-goin' to forget us, he'd a-gone and done it when he was in full feather. But now he's been in trouble and sorrow, it aren't likely, to say nothing of his liking for Marion. You recollect the night as I recommended him to chuck the other poor thing, as is dead and gone, over! Wasn't he fond of her, and wouldn't she have heard from him? Then what has gone and stopped him from letting us know where he is, and

what he is up to? Look at his letters, poor dear. Didn't he say as he was a-goin' on a long journey, hundreds of miles into the bush? Have we ever heard from him since he started on that 'ere journey up the bush? Have anybody else heard from him? No! then if not, why not? because it's my firm belief summut has happened."

"Ay, mother!" said Mr. Maggs, with his eyes and mouth opened to their fullest extent, "summut 'appened! I 'ope not. Why, whatever could 'ave 'appened?"

"Don't ask me!" Mrs. Maggs had replied, covering her face with her apron. "Don't ask me, Samwel. But summut has happened to our Tom, or he would have written to us."

"Then, by Gor!" Mr. Maggs said, striking the table, "if I thought that there, I'd be in a big mind to go arter him. I'd see the rights of it, and wery soon too."

"It mayn't be very bad, arter all!" his wife observed from underneath her apron, now trying to still the fears she had excited in her husband's breast. "But we may hear soon. Praps there's no post orfices where he is. And if there's no penny post, in course he couldn't write. So we'll wait, Samwel, and hope."

And others were waiting and hoping too. Marion was waiting and hoping. She had kept his letter, and treasured it as a miser treasures his riches. It was everything to her, until she should hear again from him. And she waited long and weary months, and then wrote to him, directing her letter to the General Post Office at Brisbane. But this letter never

reached him until long after. It lay at the Post Office until he should claim it, but as he never went to Brisbane, it remained there until two years had passed away. At last her heart became alarmed. She made inquiries of everyone she knew about the country. Mr. Piper gathered a good deal of information for her, which was not at all flattering to the colony, or calculated to sooth her fears. People had started on journeys in that country, and had never afterwards been heard of. They had been murdered and robbed, or speared by the blacks, or, perhaps, lost themselves in the wilderness, and died of thirst and starvation. What if Tom had met his death like this? The thought was almost too horrible to bear. And she hoped, and waited, and feared, and hoped again, until her heart was sick; and she had put the question to a little ballet dancer who was lying ill in her garret of a broken leg, and whom Marion was assisting out of the fulness of her own purse, until she should again be able to dance and pirouette, and balance herself on those perilous heights from which she had fallen. Don't be shocked, my dear madam! that little ballet girl maintained her old mother, and lived as pure a life as any of your delightful sex who go with blue noses and sharp faces to early winter-morning church service. "You, who have such boundless faith in His wisdom and His mercy, what would you do or think," she said to her, "were one, who was dearer to you than all else, away in a strange and dangerous country, and you had not heard of—that person after long and weary waiting? Would you not think that person was dead, or that something horrible had happened

to—to him, and would not your heart grow rebellious?'

"I don't know, miss!" little Nancy had replied, looking at her benefactress, and divining her secret at once. "My faith has been tried, but not like that. That night I broke my leg at the theatre, I thought of mother, and who would keep the roof over our heads until I got well again, and I believed somehow or other it would be done. And then *you* came. And if God will care for a poor little thing like me, and a poor worn-out old woman like mother, will He not care for you and him—that person you care for? If it was me, I would go down on my knees and pray to our Father which art in heaven to watch over and preserve—that person."

"I have done so; I do so pray continually," sobbed Marion, burying her face in the bed-clothes.

Little Nancy put her hand gently on that beautiful head, now bowed down in sorrow, and half fearfully touched the glorious hair which fell in masses on her shoulders. "Ah! miss!" she said, tenderly, "if you have so prayed, be sure *He* will do what is *best*.

And it was thus that Marion had the way pointed out to her to ease her heart of the trouble that was crushing it. It was even a greater trouble than that other one. Then he was rich, and was alive. Now he was poor, and perhaps dead. And such a death. But after that interview with little Nancy, her heart grew calmer, and she told herself that as *He* was all goodness and mercy to us His creatures, whatever *was* must be for the best. And then she went on hoping and hoping, and finally believing

that in that glorious future—that lottery bag which holds the uncertain prizes and the certain blanks of life—he would come home again bearing his sheaves with him.

It was at this time that Sam, who had been waiting and hoping for some years, again tried his fortune. "He would have one more cast of the dice before he sank into an early grave," he wrote in his diary. Once more he would stake his happiness on a woman's word. Once more he would lay his hand and fortune—he had saved three or four hundred pounds, and thought he could furnish a house handsomely with it—at Marion's feet.

During the last three years, although he had never once pleaded his love for her, he had not ceased to love her. He had promised Tom not to annoy her with his attentions, and he had loyally kept that promise. After that night at Liverpool, Sam thought his chance of ever persuading Marion to be his wife was very small. He had heard her cry to him from the boat, and he had told himself it was all over. But then, directly after, Tom had invited him to be his best man at his marriage with Constance; and, it must be confessed, that office was never more gratefully accepted than by him. Now Tom is married, he thought, *she* can't have him. He can't have two wives, unless he goes to America, and I don't think either of them would agree to that. Then, if not him, why not his best friend? If she can't have the best man, she may in time be persuaded to put up with the second best. He also stored his mind with many sayings relating to

affairs of the heart, which have become proverbs: Faint heart never won fair lady. A woman always says no when she means yes. A girl isn't worth a button who says yes the first time of asking; and it is only the over-ripe fruit which falls into one's mouth.

If she were to be won, then, by perseverance, he would win her. And now, he thought, the time had surely come. He had served almost as long an apprenticeship as Laban had asked of Jacob. He would tell her he loved her fondly and truly; that he had always loved her, and that he had waited and hoped until then. Would not such constancy and devotion be rewarded? Of what use were constancy and devotion, unless the crown were to be gained? Sam did not think of that other crown—those laurels which encircle the brows of heroes, and which are won by standing true and steadfast, without hope of reward but the consciousness of manfully fighting the fight. He had waited and hoped, and now he would ask for his reward. There was nothing now, he thought, to bar his road to success. Tom's marriage would have dealt a death-blow to her passion for him; or, should it have survived that blow, it must have since died a natural death. Tom was away thousands of miles, and she would never again see him. There was nothing for her passion to feed upon, and doubtless it was dead. Sam did not understand the heart of a true woman—that it clings closer to the object of its adoration in misery, in sickness, in poverty, than in pleasure, in health, and in riches. He looked on it as a hothouse plant, that could not stand the icy blasts of life's winter.

And so he went to offer himself once more, and to tell her he had waited and hoped.

And he sat beside her on the little sofa in Mrs. Piper's front sitting-room, and told his tale, and told it well. If there were less scorn on her part, there was nothing unnatural or theatrical on his. If Sam was still ignorant on some points, he had gained wisdom in others. He did not rave, nor tear his hair, nor even go down on his knees; but he sat quietly by her, and took her hand in his, and told her of how he loved her, had loved her for so many years; of how he had waited and hoped for the moment when she would think his constancy and devotion worthy of reward. He told her that her pleasure would be his pleasure, her happiness his care. That he would study how to soften the ills of life for her, and how to shield her best from all storms. "I have loved you, Marion, from the time you first spoke to me at home," he said. "My love has grown and strengthened with my years, and what then might have been but a boyish fancy, is now the deep and sterling passion of a man. I thought you then an angel. I think so now. I have never seen one so beautiful or so good as you. What wonder, then, if I desire to call such beauty and such goodness mine? My love has been tried, dear Marion. You tried it when you refused me in the old time, and time has tried it since. But it has stood the test. It is stronger and purer now than then. Must I have loved, and hoped, and waited in vain, then? Say, Marion, it is not so. Tell me that constancy and devotion such as mine shall meet with its reward. Tell me, Marion, you will be my wife!"

"Sam! my poor old Sam! I grieve to hear you speak like this," she answered in a low voice. "I had hoped you had forgotten all that. You must try to forget it and me."

"Never!" he said, quietly, although his face was deadly pale. "I can never do that."

"Oh, try, Sam! try!" she said, clasping her hands together, and appealing to him with her beautiful eyes.

"I tried long ago!" he replied, deeply touched at her distress. "I tried long ago, but I could not do it. I felt your goodness always in my heart. I saw your face always before my eyes. Everything I did or said, I did or said with the unconscious question to myself, 'What will she think? How will she like this?'"

"But, Sam! Sam!" she pleaded; "you must not speak like this. I am unworthy of such constancy; I *cannot* return your love. Oh, Sam! Sam! don't press me. You *must* know how it is I can be nothing to you."

"Do you—love him still?" he whispered, with white lips.

"Yes! yes!" she wept hysterically. "And he, dearest, and noblest, and best, and bravest, perhaps at this moment in sickness or danger, or facing death. Oh, I love him! I love him! I love him! for evermore."

"I—I was hardly prepared for this," Sam said, huskily. "I am sorry I spoke to you. Believe me, Marion, I would not have done so had I known you still — loved — my friend." Poor Sam had great difficulty in bringing those last words out.

"But he *is* your friend!" she said. "He is your dearest friend, Sam; your oldest friend. It was he who introduced you to our old tutor, and who was the first cause of your attaining such a place in our profession. His friendship has followed you ever since, Sam, and he has stood by you when you wanted a friend; you know he has, for you told me so yourself. And now—now he who is so good and noble is lost—yes, lost to us and to you. Has friendship no claim on you, then, Sam? Does it not tell your heart what to do? What would *you* think if *you* were away in a strange land, in danger, and he were here, and did not fly to you? What would *I* do, if I were a man? I would go away strong in my love for him," she continued, with flashing eyes, and her pale face all flushed. "I would go to him, I would search the whole world until I found him. If he were in sickness, I would nurse him; in trouble, I would comfort him. If in death," and here her voice first trembled and then grew harsh and hard—"avenge him. Yes! if they had touched as much as a hair of his head, I would crush them, and follow them, and dog their steps, and wipe out his injury in their blood. And must I, a woman, tell you, a man, and *his* friend, what to do. Oh, Sam! Sam! for shame!"

Sam was standing up now and facing the young beauty who alternately upbraided him and pleaded with him. "This is too much," he replied, quietly. "I have seen him preferred before me; I have heard him held up as an example to me. And when I ask you to be my wife, after years of weary waiting and constant devotion, you tell *me* to go

out and face all these unknown dangers and evils to bring him back to your arms! No. Let him die!"

She drew herself back from him in loathing. "Hands off," she said, savagely. "Don't touch me—don't come near me; you poison the atmosphere of the room. Go, sir! never come near me again, and carry with you the consciousness that you are a coward, and a living libel on the holy name of friendship."

The reaction had come now. It was hard to ask Sam to forego love, and pleasure, and happiness, and to go forth to he knew not what. She had asked him to bring Tom back to *her*, whom he had just asked to be his wife. And in the bitterness of his heart he spoke words he never meant. Now, however, when her fierce and scathing words fell on him like scorching fire, he repented of having spoken bitterly of friendship. He dearly loved Tom—loved him with all the affection of a brother. With a cry of horror he flung himself on his knees, while hot tears streamed down his pale face. "Forgive me!" he said. "I call heaven to witness I knew not what I said. I was mad, Marion. Forget those words; my heart was nearly broken, and I said that horrible thing. Forgive me, and forget, and never let *him* know, or I think I should die!"

"Will you go?" she asked.

"I will, so help me God!" he replied.

"Then I forgive you, as I know *he* would forgive you. He, the noblest and best. Bring him back, Sam, and I will bless you," she said.

And then she went and cried herself asleep on the

sofa, and afterwards rose up and wrote to Madam Zulmann to say she would remain at home the next morning, and directed her note to a small street in the neighbourhood of Blackfriars Bridge.

And Sam went out and wandered about the streets all night, for it was the end of the London season, and he had completed his engagements, and then went home to his rooms in the early morning, wet with the night's rain, and threw himself all dressed as he was on his bed. And about twelve o'clock in the morning he awoke, shouting and calling on Marion and Tom, and cursing all fools who stoop to folly, and pin their hopes of happiness on the love of a woman. Sam had caught cold through lying in his wet things, which brought on brain fever. Or at least the doctor, when he was called in to the patient said so, and Mrs. Vanderspek believed him. The present writer has his own opinion of the matter.

CHAPTER XVI.

While Sam was calling on Tom and Marion in his delirium that morning, Madam Zulmann was paying one of her rare visits to her daughter. She was at Mrs. Piper's almost as soon as Marion had finished breakfasting, and immediately entered on the conversation. There was, as we know, but little of that affection between these two that usually exists between a mother and daughter, for Madam Zulmann had never encouraged anything approaching familiarity or affection.

"Marion," she said, as soon as she had seated herself, "I am not in the habit of thrusting myself on you, except when your welfare requires it. I have called here to-day to speak to you of a matter which concerns your future; and, should you follow my advice, and play the cards I place in your hands, that future will be a brilliant one."

"What do you mean, mother?" Marion inquired. "Do you refer to my professional prospects? If so, they are assured already. I have just refused a provincial engagement, which, in a pecuniary point of view, would have been highly satisfactory. But I require rest, and it is my intention not to appear in public again until next season."

"I am glad to hear it," her mother replied. "It was my intention, had you made an engagement, to have advised you to throw it over, even at a sacrifice."

Then, after a few moments' pause, she continued: "We have seen so little of each other that I have no doubt I am a mystery to you. It is better so. I have my own way in life, and I follow it. But that way is not your way. From your infancy, I intended you should see as little of me as possible, and you know how I have carried that intention out. I have made sacrifices for your welfare, such as few women would have made for their daughters. I do not tell you this to urge it on you as any claim to your love. Such weakness as that is not for you and me. It is sufficient to say I had a purpose in separating your life from mine. I will not tell you what my life has been, for it would do neither of us any good. It is enough for you to know what your own has been. At the present time you are in the first rank of your profession; that would be a position brilliant enough for most girls of your age. It will, probably, last as long as your beauty lasts, and then you will fall back among those in the second rank, to give place to some other, who is younger and fresher. But I will now place you in a position that time cannot change—a position which will be above the caprice of the fickle public. I have, during all these years, been paving your path to a handsome fortune."

Marion was looking at her mother, and wondering what this future might be, and whether Tom would consent to share it with her when he should come

home again. But she said no word. And so her mother proceeded:

"You are silent, child. Well, perhaps it is better you should be, until you hear what I have to tell you. Now, pay attention to what I say, and forget nothing. The only relative besides myself you have is an old decrepit man, who cannot last much longer. He is very rich, and has no relative but yourself; and although, while I was struggling with poverty to educate you for your present position, he expressed no wish to see you, and made no offer of help, yet now he is not only willing, but anxious, to receive you into his house. It will be your duty, then, as well as your interest, to gain his confidence and his love, if he is capable of loving any living creature. You will do all you can to ingratiate yourself with him; and, as his days can at most be few, you will inherit his wealth. I need scarcely point out to a girl of good understanding, as I believe you to be, the advantages which will follow. In the first place, you *must* creep into the old man's heart, and then you will be certain to become his heiress. And then—then when you succeed to his estate, your future will be dazzling! With your beauty and youth, there will be no alliance you may not make. You may marry a title, if your ambition runs that way, and become the mother of titled men. You will be able to command an *entrée* to the best society, and your life will be one round of pleasure. Your career on the stage, instead of being a bar to all this, will, on the contrary, invest you with a degree of romance which will increase your charms. But to do this, you must separate yourself from the

past. You hear, Marion—separate yourself entirely from the past, and cut yourself off from *all* those in whom you have hitherto felt an interest, and who have shown an interest in you. No weakness must make you turn from the path I open up to you. I have laboured and waited a lifetime for this moment; and should you, by your folly, turn from that future I have offered you, I—your mother—would curse you! You have known nothing but the pleasures of the game—I nothing but the cares and anxieties. It is now time for me to meet my reward, and that reward will be in seeing you the heiress of Orleton Manor. If I lose my reward through you, I will curse you with my dying breath."

Marion remained silent for a few moments, and then said: "Mother, I have listened to you! but will you tell me what is expected of me in exchange for this future? If I am to bind or fetter myself in any way, or be a party to anything I should have reason to blush for, I shall distinctly refuse. Moreover, I tell you at once, I will never forsake those friends who have been good to me when I was friendless. As you said, your life has not been my life, nor your school my school. If I have any claim on the—the person you refer to, I shall be happy to do all I can honourably and fairly to meet your wishes."

An angry flush had overspread her mother's face while Marion was speaking, and she frowned ominously. It was just a chance there would have been an outburst in that little room of Mrs. Piper's, but by an effort she restrained herself. "As to the past," she thought, "*he*, the heir, will never trouble

us again. He will probably live his life in the Australian wilds, or it may, perhaps, be cut short by the blacks. At all events, he is not likely to turn up during the old man's life. And with respect to those others, a new life such as she will lead will be sure to wean her mind from them. Nothing parts old friends like prosperity." And so she ignored Marion's decision respecting her old friends, and said, "I have already told you, you have claims on him. You are of his own blood, and you are the only one of his blood. If his estate does not go to you, it must go to a stranger. But it will go to you, and you will be a wealthy heiress if you but act with the commonest sense."

"Then what do you wish me to do?" Marion asked.

"I wish you to come with me to see your relative. He has sent me for you, and is waiting anxiously to see you," she replied. "If you can prepare yourself by to-morrow we will start then."

"I can be ready by to-morrow," Marion replied.

"Then I will be here early in the morning for you, and we will go," her mother said. "And now I will leave you."

"Why not remain here, mother? We can arrange everything for you if you will stay," Marion replied. "I cannot imagine why you should go to any other place than this."

"Our lives are different, child. And we both know we should find but little comfort or pleasure in each other's society," her mother answered. "And now I will go."

When Marion was left alone, she began to think

over all her mother had told her. Indeed, there was considerable food for reflection. Who or what was she? What was the manner of her life? She came without warning, and she left without a farewell. Never had Marion heard a tender word from her lips, or seen a tender glance from her eye. She was cold and self-contained, although Marion believed beneath that icy surface there slumbered a volcano. Had her mother ever been young, or felt what it was to love? She almost doubted it. Some people are born old, she thought. She believed her mother had never felt the troubles, the pleasures, the hopes, the fears, or experienced the impulses of generous youth. She could not be very far advanced in life even now, and yet, from Marion's birth, this woman had steadfastly trodden the same path, and kept the same end before her; and to this end every thought and every action of her life had tended. She had never heard her speak of her father, or refer to him in the remotest degree. She had sometimes thought of this, but not often. Her mind had only taken in the fact that she had one parent. It did not appear to her as though she ever could have had a father. But now she asked herself, who was my father? what was he? what became of him? And then her mind naturally reverted to the tie between her father and her mother. Could that tie have been interest or love? What interest would a man have in linking his fate to one so mysterious as her mother? Was it possible her mother ever could have loved? And then her thoughts travelled to her own love, and in him all else was swallowed up. Where was he? was he in safety or in danger? would he return

again? did he sometimes think of her? Yes, she thought, as she remembered that parting, he did love her. Here in this room he stood, when he said farewell. If she could meet him again in this room, and say, "Here, dear, I have wealth sufficient for both. Take all, all, and me with it," she would be but too richly blessed—that would be bliss indeed. And then her fancy carried her away into that wondrous fairyland of the future, into which none may enter but the ardent and the hopeful, and after a dreamy half hour of happiness in that castle-building world of unreality, she awoke to the consciousness that she had better begin to pack her boxes, which we all know is a task requiring considerable ingenuity and time. I refer more particularly to ladies' boxes. And before she went to bed that night, she sat down and wrote to Sam, telling him where she was going, and bidding him, in the name of that friendship which existed between him and Tom, not to go back from his promise.

On the evening of the next day, Madam Zulmann and Marion reached Baswold, and drove from there in a fly to the manor house at Orleton. It had already been arranged between the former lady and the Squire when they were to present themselves, and no surprise was created when they arrived, and Marion's boxes were taken into the hall. The housekeeper, who had now grown old, welcomed Marion, and asked her if she should show her to her room. That room was the same Tom had occupied during the short period he had lived under his uncle's roof, and from which he had seen the fire of the burning ricks. When she came downstairs, she was shown

into the old dining-room, where her mother was seated in conversation with the Squire. He had greatly changed since we saw him last. Then he was as hale and hearty a man as anyone could see of his years. Now he was broken, and a complete wreck. That fall from his horse had almost killed the Squire. For many months he had hovered between life and death, but at length his strong constitution, and his determination not to die, had pulled him through. He, too, had a purpose to live for, an end to gain. That purpose was to see his nephew once more, to see him take his place in the county as the representative of the Burtons. He felt sure the lad was alive, and that he should see him; and that certainty had probably kept him alive, when, according to the doctors, he ought, as far as their science taught them, to have died. But here he was propped up with pillows, feeble it is true, but he was still in the land of the living, with that purpose in his heart as strong as ever. Had it not been, it is possible Marion would never have been there. He had no reason to love her mother, for he knew, in his heart, she had brought all the misery of hope deferred for so many years upon him. In her he saw the incendiary who had fired his ricks, and the abductor of his nephew, and you may be sure he hated her most cordially. He hated her none the less when he saw the object of her desire was to see Marion installed in his house as an acknowledged relative. But he could scheme and plan too, and what is more, he could hide his cards until the moment came for playing them and winning the odd trick. And for this reason he had consented to have

her with him, that he might get into her confidence, as she had been advised to get into his, and to learn all he could from her, and discover whether her mother had ever dropped any word before her which would clear up the mystery surrounding his heir.

"This is my daughter, Squire!" Madam Zulmann said, when Marion entered. "She has made some sacrifices to come to you, when you need some one as gentle and good as she is about you. Marion! this gentleman is your relative. I need scarcely tell you to pay him every attention and kindness, for you see he is very feeble, and requires those little attentions only a woman can give."

The Squire looked first at the speaker, and quietly chuckled as he heard her bid her daughter be careful of him. Then peering out of his eyes, which age and illness had been unable to dim, he said in a faltering voice: "Come here, deary! your mother says I'm your—your relation. Don't be afraid! I'm an old man and a broken one, as you may see; come here, and let me look into your face."

She went up to him, and took his hand in both of hers and said, "I am here, sir; I hope I may be of service to you, and be able to make you more comfortable and less lonely, as long—as long as you wish me to remain."

"Thankee, deary!" the old man replied, looking intently into her face. "It all depends, you see. We mayn't hit it off, or maybe you'll get tired of being alone with an old querulous fellow like me. Your mother says you're a Burton, but you bean't like the Burtons a bit. You bean't like your mother neither.

I don't know who you be like; you be a beauty though, I will say."

This was a strange beginning to a conversation, and Marion felt the old man's gaze embarrassing enough. There was no answer she could make to his observations, and to stand there while that old man examined her she did not care about, although she had stood unmoved, the centre on which the eyes of thousands had rested.

So she moved from before him, and said, "Let me arrange your pillows, sir; I think you are not so comfortable as you might be." And she smoothed them, and arranged them so as to give him more ease.

"You've a light hand, my lass!" he said, when she had finished, "a nice soft hand. If your tongue is as soft, you'll be a famous nurse. You can sit down now."

She sat down in silence opposite him, and no one spoke for some moments. Then the Squire, feeling himself more comfortable than his old housekeeper had been able to make him before, began to think that perhaps, after all, he would be a gainer in more ways than one by Marion's presence, and gradually fell off into a doze.

Madam Zulmann then quietly rose from where she had been silently watching them, and beckoning to Marion, left the room.

"You have made a favourable impression on him," she whispered, when they stood in the hall. "Be sure you strengthen it. I shall leave now I have seen you settled. The fly will take me back to Baswold. I shall probably give you as little of my company

as I have hitherto done, and shall only see you when my presence or advice is necessary. Don't come out; I can find my way alone."

"But you will surely take some refreshment before you go, mother," Marion replied. "The housekeeper I am sure would get you something in a few moments. Shall I ask her?"

"No, girl!" her mother answered, almost fiercely. "Not in this house; at least, *not yet!*" And she went out.

When Marion returned to the dining room, the Squire's eyes were wide open, and he was chuckling with apparently great glee. "She's gone, then, is she deary?" he said.

"Yes, sir; my mother did not wish to disturb you, and she has returned to Baswold in the fly which brought us here," she replied.

"Well, I beant sorry!" said the Squire, while his eyes twinkled. "No, not a bit. Your mother, deary, is a queer 'un; perhaps I shouldn't say it before you. But truth is truth. She *is* a queer 'un. And maybe we'll get on better without her. You beant like your mother in your ways and your temper, be you? She's got an awful temper, as I'll be bound you know."

She was beginning to be interested in him; and his keen observation and quaint manner of speech amused her. "I am afraid none of us are perfect," she replied, with a smile. "I daresay you have some weaknesses, and I am certain I have. If my temper is of the unfortunate type you fear, believe me, I will try to keep it under command."

"I hope so, my lass!" the Squire said. "But if

you do, it will be more than any Burton ever did, or your mother either."

And then she sat down again, and began to wonder whether the Squire would order her some dinner. She had been travelling all day, and was very much fatigued, and at that moment a cup of tea and a crust would have been more than welcome.

Presently the old man said, "There's my pipe on the mantelpiece, and the tobacco is on the sideboard. Take it down, deary, and load it for me. You'll have to load my pipe now. Don't push it in too tight. You'll do it better than th' old woman, I'll be bound."

"There! that'll do!" he said, when she had loaded his pipe and given it him. "Now hand me a light. Thankee, deary!" And he smoked on in silence for some time, watching her all the while from out of the clouds of smoke.

"Do you believe in spontaneous bursts of affection?" he asked her, after a while.

"I hardly know what you mean!" she replied, blushing, as her thoughts instantly flew to Tom.

"Well, then, to put it plainer, my dear, do you believe that if a father and daughter happened to meet, unbeknown to each other, their hearts would jine, as you may say, and tell 'em who they were," the Squire continued.

"I have heard it is so. I can imagine it may be so," Marion replied, wondering at the turn the old man's thoughts had taken.

"Do you think your heart would beat quicker if you were in the presence of your father?" he asked, while his eyes remained fixed on her face.

"I believe it would," she replied.

"Does it beat quicker in my presence?" he went on.

"No," she replied, trembling.

"Neither does mine; not one morsel quicker, deary," he said. "There beant no spontaneous outburst of affection between us, I reckon."

The drift of his conversation then flashed on her, and she rose up from her seat, and leaning forwards towards him with her hands clasped, she said, in an eager whisper, "Sir! sir! you are not my f——"

"No, no, lass! I'm not th' father!" the old man replied, laughing heartily to himself. "I'm no more th' father than old Ben down there in the kitchen. And thee haven't got th' mother's temper neither. I've been watching thee, deary, and can see th' art starving and faint for summut to eat. Just ring the bell, and I'll go to bed."

Marion rang the bell, and the old housekeeper came into the room. "Tell Ben to come, and get me to bed," he said to her. "And get this young lady some dinner d'rectly! Run this minute, mind. And be sure you get up a bottle of th' old particular port. Good night, deary! Ay, dear me, what fancies get into young heads! I'm no more th' father than old Ben. That I'll swear. He! he! he!"

And then Marion sat down to her dinner, and drank strong tea instead of old port. And the strangeness of her present position occupied her thoughts for a long time, and she wondered what her relation to that old man could be. And then she thought of her old friends, and began to wonder whether Sam really would keep his promise; and if

he did, whether she should see him again before he started on that uncertain journey. And at that moment poor old Sam was lying in an uneasy slumber in his room at Mrs. Vanderspek's, while Mr. Maggs was applying, with all the tenderness of a woman, a cooling lotion to his bare pate, for the doctor had sent for the barber, and Sam's head was shaved. And at the foot of the bed stood a young girl of about eighteen years of age, whose fathomless eyes were like Marion's. But, beyond this, there was little resemblance between them. Polly Wright had come up with Sam's parents to nurse him. And Mrs. Maggs stood by her, preparing his medicine for him as soon as he should awake to rave, and cry, and toss in the delirium of fever. "And he is allays a-calling arter her!" she said, wiping her eyes. "He's fond of her, I'm afeard. It's awful trying. There's Tom fond of her, and he's away, and perhaps lost to us for ever. And there's she as fond of him as any poor creature can be, and she can't have him. And here's our Sam a gone off his head about her, which in course he can't have, by reason of her fancying our Tom. And it's a weary world altogether, Polly, and nought but losses and crosses, as far as I see."

CHAPTER XVII.

In the intervals of hard work on the Station, Tom made several journeys to the neighbouring run of Toowoomba, for the purpose of obtaining specimens of the surface ores. He obtained many specimens of malachite, and some few indications of gossan ores, and this success gave him hopes of at length discovering a regular lode. It was only after many months, however, that his hopes were realised. He and Mr. Seedly had been one day prospecting, and had met with scarcely any indications of mineral wealth. This was not to be wondered at, for they had never made a regular prospecting campaign, but merely went for a day occasionally. Had they gone oftener, or remained on the run longer, it is possible Mr. Donovan would have had some idea of what they were after.

The sun was just going down in a blaze of glory, when Mr. Seedly, tired and worn-out with the day's labour, proposed starting for Tangaboora. "We are at least fifteen miles from home," he said, "and night will close in, in another hour. I vote we start, Tom, and, by Jove, I'm in want of my dinner. Prospecting is work more fit for young fellows like you than men of my age, so let us saddle up."

Tom was working away—harder, perhaps, than he

had done before that day. He had at length, he thought, found what they were in search of. Without looking up, he said, "Give me half an hour more. I shall be ready by that time; and while I am here, you can saddle the nags."

At the end of about ten minutes he sprang to his feet and shouted to the little man to come to him. Mr. Seedly had just finished saddling their horses, and immediately galloped up.

"What is it, Tom?" he inquired. "Have you found anything?"

"I think I have!" Tom replied. "Jump off and look here. Do you see this? I believe it to be the matrix of the ore." He had found a regular lode gangue.

They looked at each other, and then began to laugh. Both of them thought that perhaps they had at last fallen on their legs again.

"Do you think it is all right, Tom?" asked the little man.

"I don't know yet," Tom replied. "I have no doubt, as far as I am able to judge, we are at this moment standing over a lode of copper ore. The only question is, whether the ore contains copper in sufficient quantities to pay for working it."

"Gad, I hope so!" said Mr. Seedly. "You must find that out, Tom; and if it does we must buy our neighbour Donovan out. It would be a glorious thing if we could hit it off."

"Well, we may as well start now!" Tom said. "I can find the spot again, and we must get some specimens of the ore, and I will test them." And they rode home to Tangaboora in the twilight, and

talked of what they would do if, as Mr. Seedly said, they had fallen on their legs. They would go home again, that was certain. We know for what purpose Tom would have returned. And as for the little man, no sooner did visions of wealth appear in the future, than he began to regard the country as a very poor one for a gentleman to live in. "For making money this country may be the very deuce," he said; "but for spending it, give me the old country."

"We must make it before we can spend it," Tom said, laughing. "At the present moment we are even too poor to buy Donovan's interest in the run without help."

"Oh, we shall make it safe enough!" replied the little man. "Why, there's sure to be copper there in paying quantities; you think so yourself. And we'll get up a company to work it. Why, it's a big fortune Tom. Those Sydney fellows are always willing to find money, if the probable gains are big. We'll sell the mine, that is when it is a mine, for a couple of hundred thousand pounds—one half in cash, and the other in fully paid-up shares. I can see our way as plain as possible."

They told Mr. Eversley the result of their search when they arrived at home, and on the following day all three of them set off to the spot, for the purpose of obtaining some of the ore for analysis. Some time previous to this, Mr. Eversley had procured from Brisbane all the apparatus necessary for properly assaying metals. You may be sure then that while Tom was busy with his crucibles, there was no little excitement at Tangaboora. It was so easy a way of becoming rich. Not at all like sheep-farming or cattle.

rearing, in which you may nevermake a fortune at all, or if you do, it must be the result of infinite patience and forethought. But here, thought Mr. Seedly, we are rich at once—if our ore is but rich. It all depended on Tom's verdict. Neither Mr. Eversley nor Mr. Seedly went far from the house that day. They were anxious to hear the verdict as soon as it could be given. But all things take time to accomplish, and when Tom came to them covered with perspiration, they could hardly wait to hear the result of his examination.

"Well, nephew, and how do you find it?" asked Mr. Eversley.

"To be or not to be," said Mr. Seedly, "that is the question, Tom; so out with it, and put me out of my misery."

"I think it is 'to be,'". Tom answered. "But if you will come into the house, where we can talk at our ease, I will give you a summary of what I have done."

"Now then," he said, when they were seated, "I have assayed something like a dozen specimens, and the results are simply astounding. Neither of them contained less than fifty per cent. of pure copper. Here is one little fellow; just look at that now. I broke a piece of that ore off and assayed it. It is almost pure copper. Here is another which contains ninety-four per cent. And they average about eighty per cent. all round. I think, uncle, we should not wait any longer before buying that run, and as soon as we have settled with Donovan, we must get a special grant from the Land Commissioner to work these ores. *I* should

say it is just probable in another few months we shall be comfortably off."

"Comfortably off!" said the little man, rising from his chair and performing a sort of war dance round the room. "We shall be rich! deuced rich. We'll all go home again, and hunt four days a week. Do you hear, Tom? four days a week—and such fishing we'll have. Fishing! why, dash it all, we'll have a salmon river, and I'll stand the shot."

"Steady, Silas!" said Mr. Eversley, laughing. "You must walk before you run, you know. There are many things to do before you will put all that money in your pocket. Now I tell you what we must do. In the first place, we must buy Donovan's interest in the run, and as his interest is but a pastoral one, and has nothing to do with mining, twenty thousand pounds ought to buy him out. We can then apply for a special grant to work the minerals, and I think we shall have no difficulty in procuring one. We will then begin to regularly work it as a mine, and after it is in working order, we can, if you like, hand it over to a company. It will require thirty thousand pounds, though, to get it to that state. That will be ten thousand each."

"But I say, Bob!" said Mr. Seedly, "where will we get twenty thousand? We have but ten thousand, and that belongs to Tom, you know."

"Your credit will stand good for the other ten thousand!" replied Mr. Eversley, smiling. "Donovan must take ten thousand down in cash, and your bills for ten thousand at twelve months. I will find the other ten thousand for the mining expenses. We will have a regular deed of partnership drawn

up, and the profits will be shared alike, as we find equal shares of the capital. The Toowoomba Mining Company won't sound badly, Silas, will it? It will be a fine thing to draw our three or four thousand a year each from it, but a better thing still to see the shares of The Toowoomba Mining Company (Limited) quoted in the papers. I'm for a public company as soon as we get everything settled. It saves you such a lot of trouble, and you can always get rid of your interest in the concern, or any part of it, without trouble or delay. Why, Silas, you would make a splendid chairman of a board of directors!"

"Pretty well," laughed the little man. "I fancy I know as much of public companies as most men in the colony, Bob. I've sat on the board of more than one, I can tell you, and might have been a chairman by this time, perhaps, hadn't the luck turned the other way."

"We'll have you on again soon, I hope," said Mr. Eversley. "There will be no want of public money when it is known how rich the ore is. Besides that, the value of the station will be much increased by it, and I'll warrant you'll have some large offers for it as soon as it is known we have copper in such purity."

Within a few days after this conversation took place, they rode over to Toowoomba. Mr. Donovan was leaning over the fence of the five hundred acre paddock when they rode up. There were no signs of vegetation near the house, which was of the most ordinary type of a squatter's shanty. For a considerable distance all round, the place was as bare

and arid as a desert. No attempts had been made to beautify it with creepers, or shrubs, or pleasant gardens, or if any had been made, they had signally failed. It was in the cool of the morning, and a flock of low-class sheep were being driven from the fold away to their pasture.

"Ah! Mister Eversley, the top of the morning to ye and your friends!" said Mr. Donovan. "Faith, me boy, and you're out early."

"It's the early bird that catches the worm, you know!" Mr. Eversley replied. "Besides that, it's rather hot travelling now in the middle of the day, when the sun is up."

"Bedad, it's always hot in this miserable country!" Donovan remarked. "It's so hot in the day a boy hasn't heart to work, and all noight, what with the hate and the flays, shure you can't get a wink of slape. But come in! you haven't breakfasted yet, and we'll foind something for ye, only there's no praties at all, worse luck."

"Let me introduce my companions to you, Donovan," said Mr. Eversley. "This is my friend, Mr. Seedly, and here is my nephew, Mr. Burton. They are lately come out from the old country, and perhaps may settle here."

"Faith, then, but I'm afraid they'll repint of that before they've been here long," Donovan replied. "But, anyhow, they're welcome to Toowoomba. And how are ye, sirr? Step in, and moind your heads, for the door is low."

When they entered the living room of the house, a good-looking young woman of about six-and-twenty, with raven hair, black flashing eyes, and beautifully

white teeth, tried to make her escape. Her dress consisted of little else than a bodice and a short skirt, and her beautifully shaped legs and feet were quite innocent of covering.

"Arrah, thin, Katty! where are ye off whin we have visitors? Can't ye welcome me friends?" said Donovan, trying to detain her.

But she dexterously eluded him, and escaped into another room. "Sure," she replied, "I wasn't expecting to see anybody, Phil, or I'd not be in this divil of a pickle."

"Faith, then, she's shoi!" Mr. Donovan informed them. "Me sister was used to all the illigances and refoinments of loif at Donovan Castle, County Limerick. It's a change for Kathleen, mark ye, to come from the home of me ancesthors to this divil of a country. But sit ye down, she'll be back prisintly; and I'll go bail she'll do the honours of me poor house in a stoil that will both surproise and deloight ye. And what'll ye take?"

They would take nothing before breakfast, they said, or until Miss Donovan should return. Presently that young lady made her appearance in all the glory of a faded silk dress of the most brilliant green. It was their national colour, you see; and the children of the Emerald Isle carry their nationality with them wherever they go. She had also a brooch of the most extensive pattern in her breast, and earrings in her little ears. But Tom noticed that her slippers were too big for her small feet, and her stockings were down at heel.

She expressed her deloight at receiving their visitors in their humble mansion, making fine play

all the while with her eyes and her teeth. She informed them that the Donovans of Donovan Castle were the rale aristocracy, divil doubt it! and that their name was one of the ouldest in ould Oirland, though she would have had no objection to change it for another. In fact, as Mr. Seedly afterwards remarked, she made the pace hot for all of them; and kept up, at the same time, a running fire on the Irish girl who acted as maid-of-all-work to the establishment, and humble friend of her mistress, of "Biddy, ye divil, do this!" or, "Biddy, ye hussy, don't ye see the pup is in me brother's friend's way?"

And then they sat down to a breakfast of mutton chops and damper, which they washed down with tea. There seemed to be plenty of everything, but no attempt at comfort. Mr. Seedly thought they would alter all that when *they* took possession. Rough and ready was all very well in its way, but plenty and comfort would not cost one penny more.

"Ye must accept me apologies for the humble fare on me board," Mr. Donovan said to them. "Oi intended to have kept up an establishment when oi came here, but me sister thought it 'ud be of no use, as we intind returning to Donovan Castle, the home of me familee for generations. You should have seen the illigance there, bedad! Shouldn't they, Kathleen?"

"I believe ye, Phil!" Kathleen replied. "But, sure, the little man has no tay! Pass your cup, sor, and I'll give ye some as black as yer hat, and as strong as whiskey. But it's poor stuff, afther all,

compared to what we used to have at Donovan Castle."

"True for you, Katty!" her brother remarked. "Sure, them was the toimes, when oi hunted me own hounds and druv four-in-hand."

At length Mr. Eversley had an opportunity of putting in a word. "This mutton is your own rearing, I suppose, Donovan?"

"Sure, an' it is; but ye should have tasted me mutton at Donovan Castle. Five-year-old wether mutton! Divil a lie in it!" replied Mr. Donovan.

"You had better stock, there, I suppose," remarked Tom.

"I believe ye!" his host replied. "Colonial sheep are but poor divils, afther all. There's no fleece and no mutton on them."

"You should have fenced the run in, and imported some high-class blood," Mr. Eversley said. "Had you done that, the station would have been worth a good sum now—perhaps twenty thousand pounds."

"Bother the fincing!" Mr. Donovan said. "What's the use whin I've been going back to Oirland by every mail for the last fifteen years! But, faith! we mane to start now in airnest. Don't we, Katty?"

"I believe ye, Phil! And quoite toime, too," his sister answered. "I'm sick and toired of the countree."

"And no wondher, me poor girl, after the illigances and refoinments ye were accustomed to," her brother said. "But, bedad! we'll go sure enough, now, as soon as iver I can get some one to buy the propertee. And a very purty propertee, too, though I say it."

"What'll you take for it, Donovan?" inquired Mr. Eversley in an unconcerned manner. "Don't name too high a price, you know. If you ask anything like a fair sum, my nephew and Mr. Seedly might be tempted to buy."

"'Deed, then, and I'll not," Mr. Donovan replied. "I've a great friendship for ye, Eversley, as ye well know, and I'll ask ye less than I would any other gintleman of me acquaintance. Faith, it's true what I tell ye, isn't it, Katty?"

"'Deed, then, I believe ye, Phil," Kathleen answered. "Ye'll ask half what it's worth, I'm thinking, seeing what a friendship ye have for all at Tangaboora."

"Bedad, thin, an' so I will. I'll ask ye no more than twenty-five thousand for me interest in the station, including all me illigant and highly bred stock, and the furniture of me humble mansion at a valuation. It's a certain fortune, sor, I tell ye, an' your worthy uncle, me esteemed friend, knows I would tell ye no lie," said Mr. Donovan impressively to Tom.

"Say half the money, Donovan. You know your stock is about as bad as it can be. As you said just now, they carry neither fleece nor mutton. And I'll be bound to say you don't get forty per cent. of lambs even in the most successful season, and as to your clip, the less said about it the better. What do you say to ten thousand?" Mr. Eversley remarked, laughing all the while at Donovan's way of showing his friendship.

"Now come, that's too much the other way," Mr. Donovan observed. "But there, ye were always fond of a joke."

"'Deed, an' ye may say that, Phil," his sister put in, laughing and showing her white teeth. "I'll go bail he was always a rampant, funny divil, an' he's joking ye now."

"Gad! I think the joke was the other way, Miss Kate!" said Mr. Eversley. "Your brother knows well enough there's not a man in the colony would give him anything like the money he asks."

"Sure, thin, who wants to sell to them already settled?" Donovan replied. "When a station changes owners, it ought to go to a new chum. 'Deed, an' it's the only chance a decent man has of making money. But me sister, who has been used to all the illigances and refoinements of loife, knows nothing of business; an' if ye mane daling, faith, we'll do it quietly an' gentaly over some good whisky after she has retoired."

The result of this conversation was that Mr. Seedly and Tom agreed to pay to Mr. Donovan ten thousand pounds down in cash, and bills at six months for five thousand more. The purchase money to include all stock as it stood, folds, huts, washing, clipping, and wool sheds, fencing around the paddock and the house. They further agreed to give a sum of twenty pounds for the furniture therein, an arrangement in which it must be confessed Mr. Donovan had considerably the best of it.

There was a good deal to be done when they took possession of their purchase, you may be sure. The old flocks were weeded, and the drafts sent to the boiling-house. Merino rams were purchased, and paddocks marked out for fencing. But above all they prosecuted their venture in mining. A special

grant had been made them, and the ground had been surveyed. Then Mr. Eversley had to put his hand pretty deeply into his pocket, and stamps were erected for crushing the ore, and miners were engaged. The new proprietors wisely placed the direction of these operations in the hands of Captain William Anthony, whose experience of over twenty years in Cornwall had qualified him for the office. Under his management, they soon began to work the lode with a promise of considerable profit, and at the end of six months that gentleman was able to report a weekly average of thirty tons of crushed ore.

Of course reports of this new mine soon found their way into the columns of the colonial papers. The Toowoomba mine was quoted as the richest in the colony, and instead of the proprietors having to set about floating a company, it was not long before a company of capitalists was formed at Sydney for its purchase, of whose existence they were ignorant until the arrival of an expert, who requested permission to inspect the lode. This was granted, and within one year of their purchase, the Toowoomba Mining Company (Limited) was an established fact, with six thousand shares of fifty pounds each. The proprietors were paid by the company for its purchase one hundred thousand pounds in cash and fifty thousand in fully paid-up shares, which, after the first dividend had been declared, were quoted at one hundred and ten pounds per share. That dividend was at the rate of seventy-five per cent. on the paid-up capital.

Mr. Eversley's prediction as to the increased value the run would acquire was verified. After the com-

pany had been started some few months, Mr. Seedly and Tom received an offer of forty-five thousand pounds for the station. They first consulted with Mr. Eversley, and then agreed to sell. There was nothing more to keep them in the colony, and both of them began to dream dreams, and see visions of future happiness before them. They would be rich, comparatively speaking, and they would realise all their wealth, and go home again. "And why you remain here any longer, Bob, I'll be shot if I know!" the little man said to his old friend. "Taking the shares you hold in the mine at present quotations, you will pull off about seventy thousand, and your station will be worth as much more, I daresay. And then I'll be bound you've got a pretty heap of money in some other concerns. Why don't you come home too, Bob? 'pon my word you ought, if only for your wife's sake, and for the education of the youngsters. Why, you must be worth a hundred and fifty thousand, if you're worth a penny, and to keep such a lot of money as that in a confounded hot country, where you can't reasonably spend a thousand a year, is absolutely wicked."

"A hundred and fifty thousand won't do, Silas," replied Mr. Eversley, smiling. "I'll give that to little Mary when I die, and Bob shan't feel the want of it. If I could realise at this moment, old lad, I should be worth about—half a million. Why, my property in Melbourne alone is worth a hundred thousand!"

The little man stood staring at his friend with open mouth. He regarded him with awe. He had known some leviathans who had made, or were said to have made, half a million. But here was one

before him. He had been sitting at the same table with him for the last two years; had slapped him on the back, and called him "old fellow." He could never do that again. He might have slapped a sixty thousand pounder, or even a hundred thousand pounder, on the shoulder, and called him "old fellow," but to lay hands on a five hundred thousand pounder! never! But he recovered himself after a while, and said, "I'd advise you to sell, sir—Bob, I mean. Realise, and let us all go home. And really, now I think of it, a gentleman of your position ought to take a country and hunt a pack of hounds. You ought, indeed, sir—Bob, I mean."

"Well, Silas," Mr. Eversley replied, amused at the great respect the little man had suddenly conceived for him, "I think I shall sell, and by Jove, we'll all go to Sydney and put things shipshape."

And one blazing hot day a little tubby gentleman was sauntering along the shady side of the principal street in Sydney, between two others who were remarkable for their great size and wonderful resemblance to each other. And the little man presently stopping, said, "I'll be hanged if I go through this violent exercise any longer. A joke is a joke, but a hundred and twenty degrees of heat in the shade isn't. Let's go in here and have a few ices."

And they went into a shop magnificent in plate glass windows and mirrors. And the younger of the three, after reading various broadsheets hanging on the walls or spread out on the little tables in the room, suddenly exclaimed, "By Jove, this beats everything. Here, uncle Silas, read this!" and he

handed the little gentleman a flaming poster, on which was printed in letters three inches long, and of every colour of the rainbow :—

THEATRE ROYAL OF SYDNEY.

For a few nights only, by Special Request,

Will appear

In the Divine Shakespeare's

Tragedy of

HAMLET, PRINCE OF DENMARK,

MR. SEYMOUR BEAUFORT,

Late of the Theatre Royal, London.

For further particulars see small handbills.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Soon after Marion's appearance at the Manor House, she received a letter from Polly Wright informing her of Sam's illness. She had been hoping he was preparing for the journey he had promised to undertake, and had been expecting almost every day either to see him or to hear from him. Sometimes a doubt arose in her mind whether he had not regretted his promise, and gone back from it. But this thought was banished from her mind when she remembered his genuine distress and sorrow for having said what he had said that night the promise was made. But here was the explanation of the delay. Poor Sam was lying dangerously ill. To say that she was sorry would not be much. She was greatly distressed at it, not only on account of her old friend, but on Tom's account, who at that moment might be in want of the succour Sam might be able to give. And so she wrote back and offered to come and help to nurse him. This offer, however, was declined. "His mother and herself were with him," Polly wrote, "and they had secured the services of a nurse from St. George's Hospital; so that, as far as nursing went, he was well looked after. She would, however, let Marion

know at intervals how he went on, and report to her any change that might take place in his condition." And with this Marion was obliged to be content. She could not force her services on them, and indeed, she thought her presence might have an effect the reverse of beneficial on the patient. It would have been different had the patient been Tom. Were he ill she would have flown to him, and nursed him, and watched over him, though all the mothers, and adopted sisters, and professional nurses in the world stood in the way.

And so the time went on at Orleton. The Squire had become fond of Marion, and indeed, she was almost necessary to him. She did not bother him with her conversation when he was not in the humour for talking. His pillows were arranged for him with tender care, and his comfort in every way increased by her presence. Besides this, she was of considerable use to him in helping him to keep his accounts; and, indeed, she acted as his secretary. The Squire could not get out of doors now and manage the home farm as he had used to do, and look after his labourers; but old Ben, the bailiff, whose tongue was quite as sharp as his master's, could. And if things did not go on to the Squire's satisfaction, Ben was sure to get a wigging, and he would make those under him exceedingly uncomfortable. The Squire farmed almost as well from his dining-room as before his accident. He had a map of the farm laid on the table after breakfast, every field named, and its acreage given. He knew how many teams were at

work on any particular part of the farm, when they went on, and when they finished; and if they took longer to perform the work than he considered necessary, there were sure to be hard words thrown at old Ben. All this Marion had to keep an account of. She entered in the labour-book who were ploughing, and who were harrowing, how many horses they had, and how long they were about it. She also became aware of what the lowest price was per rod at which hedging and ditching could be done. And all this she did, not only without showing signs of being bored, but even with a considerable show of interest.

The old man would frequently express to her his satisfaction. "Thee would make a capital farmer's wife, deary!" he would say. "If my nevvy were only here, I'd bet a shilling he'd take a fancy to thee. Ay! and I dunno but he should marry thee. A' might go farder and fare worse, I'll be bound."

One morning, after she had been a resident there for about three months, he sat watching her adding up long columns of figures in one of his account-books. When she had finished and put the work by, he said, "Come and sit down opposite me, my lass. I want to talk to thee!"

She came and sat down by the fire, facing him. "Now I am ready to listen to you!" she said, smiling. "What is it? Am I to blow up Ben because the forty-acre piece is not finished, or must I write to Mr. Sutton and tell him those last seeds he sent were not equal to the sample."

"Nay! nay!" he replied, "it's about summut else—about yourself, deary. Your mother was here

last night, and I had a long talk with her. She says it's time thee went back to London."

"And I was at Mr. Althorpe's," said Marion. "Why does my mother do everything so mysteriously?"

"She always was so!" the Squire answered. "It's her way, deary, I suppose. Some people must go about everything in a crooked manner, and can't walk straight to save their lives. *You* don't want to go back to London, do you?"

"Not at present, unless you wish me to go!" she replied. "I am free from all engagements for some months. Do you wish me to leave?"

"Nay! not I," he said; "I'd like thee to stop here altogether. I've talked it over with th' mother. She says th'art wasting th' opportunities down here, nursing an old fellow like me, and ought to be at work at th' profession. But I've put all that right; I've made a will, and left thee twenty thousand pound, and if my nevvy don't come back again, I've left thee everything. But you mustn't reckon on that, for he'll come back, I tell 'ee."

"Oh, sir!" Marion replied; "if my mother induced you to do this, I cannot consent to it. I cannot remain, if you have been cajoled into making this provision for me."

"But I haven't been cajoled, I tell thee!" he said. "I did it of my own free will, though I must say it hit in with th' mother's fancy too. She wanted me to leave my nevvy out, for they say he's dead. But I know better. He'll come back some day, you'll see. But there, deary, you've worked enough, and listened enough, for one day. I had

provided for thee even before th' mother came here last night, so I wasn't influenced by her; not a bit. And you be off now, and tell the lad to saddle the mare, and gallop over and have a talk wi' parson's wife. A breath of fresh air will do thee good, for th'art looking pale to-day."

It was true what the Squire had told Marion. On the preceding night, Madam Zulmann had been at the Manor House with the intention of inducing the Squire to make a will in favour of her daughter. She had given her time, she thought, to worm herself into the old man's affections, so that, old and broken as he now was, he would feel himself unable to do without her. She calculated also on the weakness of mind which usually accompanies age and infirmities. But here she had made a miscalculation; the Squire's faculties were as sharp as they had ever been, and her persuasion alone would not have induced him to have left her daughter even a mourning ring. The fact was that her patience and gentle ways had won his heart. Day after day she had worked in that room for him, and nursed him, and always without a sign of impatience or peevishness. And then he thought, when his nephew returned—and that he would return was a religion with him—Marion would make him a good wife. And he, too, built his castles in the air, and speculated on the future. It was this which had prompted him to provide for her in his will; and it was his habitual caution which induced him to make her his residuary legatee, in case his nephew did not turn up. He never once thought that clause would come into force; but he entered it

as a provision against an almost impossible contingency.

When Madam Zulmann left the Manor House that night, she thought her work was at last accomplished, and for a time she was satisfied. That Tom would never turn up, she was sure. Even if he did after the old man's death, who was to recognise him? Who could say he was the Squire's nephew? But here the devil whispered in her ear, —*after* the old man's death—*after!* Yes! But what if he should come back *before!* And this thought haunted her all the way as she walked back to Baswold. And it kept her awake in the darkness of the night. And that voice seemed for ever whispering: "But what if he should come back *before* the old man's death!" And then her face set, and she determined, rather than lose what she had been playing for all her life, he should die. She wished he had died—that she had made his death certain, when, as a child, he had laid at her feet with his pale face turned upwards. It would have been easy then—better for her and for him. Strong men, and he was a strong man—stronger and of more vitality, indeed, than most men—die hard. He would die hard. There would, perhaps, even after the blow was struck, be a death struggle. And then that voice again whispered: "But old men, and broken men, die easy." And she sprang upright in her bed. The Squire was old and broken. His days could not be many, even at the most. What easier than to quietly put him aside. "Nothing! nothing! Put him aside, and your work is done," whispered that voice. And she said in her heart,

"I will do it." And then for the first time that night she fell asleep.

The days were short now, and the evening was closing in when Marion left the rectory. Dick Althorpe, the parson's eldest son, was home on furlough, and walked by the side of her horse until they came to the Manor House. It was quite dark then; and when she had given up her horse to the groom in the stable-yard, as her companion would not come into the house, she walked straight to the dining-room. Everything was very quiet and still, and she thought the Squire was probably asleep before the fire. If he were, she would not waken him, and so she quietly opened the dining-room door a little way, and looked in. For one moment she thought she would have died.

The Squire was sitting in his arm-chair so quiet and still that had it not been that his eyes were wide open, and fixed in an unmeaning stare on her, she would have thought he slept. The dining-room window opened out on the lawn, so that one could pass in and out of the room without going into the hall. One of the doors of the window was open. A closely-veiled figure of a woman was leaning over the back of the Squire's chair. In one hand she held a glass-stoppered phial, and with the other held a white pocket-handkerchief over his nose and mouth. So intent was she on her deed that she three times poured the contents of the phial into the handkerchief, and held it for the Squire to inhale, without being aware she was seen. We have said that for one moment Marion thought she would have died. Her face expressed all the horror she felt.

The next moment, however, it assumed an expression never seen there before. Her strongly-marked brows came down in a deep heavy frown over her grey eyes, which blazed with a light strange to them. Her jaw became fixed, and her lips as firm as granite. In another second she had glided across the room, and encircled the wrists of the woman with her long lithe fingers, lapping them round her like bands of steel. The figure made an effort to free herself, and in so doing loosened her veil, and dropped the phial, the contents of which fell on the Squire's cheek, and trickled down until it lost itself in the folds of his neckcloth. A strong smell of ether pervaded the room. There was a sharp, silent struggle for one moment, and then it ceased. Marion held her wrists as in a vice. And then the figure looked up, and their eyes met. She saw her mother. "Go! go!" she said, in a fierce whisper. "Go, before it is too late; and never let me see you again."

In another moment she was alone with the Squire. He appeared to be stupefied. She shook him sharply—even violently. She spoke loudly in his ear. "Look at me. Speak to me. It is I—Marion!" she said.

Presently his eyes lost their vacant look, and by a vigorous effort he overcame the effects of the vapour he had inhaled. And then he looked up at her, and took her beautiful hand in his, and trembling, patted it. And then he gave a quiet chuckle, and said, "What an awful smell! She was a'most one too many for me that time. Thee were only just in time, deary. I was confoundedly sleepy, I

tell 'ee. But a miss is as good as a mile. Th' mother—if she be th' mother, and dash me if I think her could have a daughter like thee—was always a violent woman. But there, deary, you've saved the few days left to me, I will say. And th'art trembling now. Go up, and change th' gown, and we'll have some tea. Nay! you needn't be afraid. Her'll not return again, I warrant; and if she did, just give me the bell-rope, and old Ben 'll soon come up."

And now the reaction came. Her nerves, which had been strung to their highest tension, gave way, and she had alternate fits of weeping and hysteria. This took place in her own room, and it was a long time before the old housekeeper could recover her sufficiently to appear again in the dining-room. By-and-by she did, however, go down, and poured out the Squire's tea for him, and busied herself in her usual manner for his comfort.

And after tea was over, she wheeled his chair to the fire, and arranged his pillows, and sat down opposite him.

Presently he said, "Give me my pipe, deary! I'll have a smoke, and then I want to talk to 'ee."

She took his pipe down, and loaded it, and gave it him. And then he smoked on in silence for some minutes, sending thin spiral wreaths of smoke upwards about his venerable old head, and keeping those bright eyes of his, which nothing appeared to dim, on her face.

"I wish my nevvy was back," he said, after a while. "He's been away a weary long time!"

Receiving no answer from Marion, who was staring

into the fire, thinking possibly of one *she* wished was back, he continued, "I never told 'ee anything about my nevvy, did I, deary?"

"No," she answered. "I have heard you wish your nephew would come back to you; but you have told me nothing."

"'Would you like to hear about him, my lass?" he said. "Shall I tell you about my little Tommy, who was stolen away from me nigh upon twenty year ago?"

She looked up at him all attention. "I should like to hear it," she replied.

"Then I'll tell 'ee, my dear!" he said. "I've meant to tell 'ee all about him ever since you've been here, when the time should come. And the time is come now, I reckon. You're a good lass, you be, and I'll warrant you'll feel for an old man who has waited, and waited, and hoped, and never given up hope for twenty year. It's weary waiting, that it is. I'll be bound it's bad enough for young people like you; but for an old fellow like me, whose days are nigh ended, it's wearisome work, I tell 'ee. But I never gave up hope. They said my nevvy was drowned in th' river. But I know better; and he'll come back again, I'm sartain. Here, deary, fill my pipe again."

She refilled his pipe for him, and, after a few moments' pause, during which he appeared to be dozing, he looked up at her as bright as ever, and continued, "They thought I'd given up all hope of my nevvy coming home again; but I hadn't, I tell 'ee. They thought that, because I don't talk much about him. But if I beant a good un' to talk, I'm

a beggar to think! And I've been a thinking of him all these weary years. I've been saving money for him—a pretty heap, too, I can tell 'ee. The estate is now a thousand acres bigger than when I came into it. There's old Cantrip's place is mine, and the Hollybank farm too. I bought 'em all for my nevvy when he comes home again, and he'll flutter his feathers wi' the best of 'em, I'll warrant."

After another pause of a few moments' duration, during which the old man smoked vigorously, and puffed out clouds of smoke, he continued, "It's close upon twenty-one years ago that my brother Tom died away there in the West Injies, and his widow came home to me, bringing wi' her her little boy. She was a winsome creetur', an' I don't wonder at brother Tom making himself a fool for her sake. She was as soft, and quiet, and pleasant as any woman in the world. I wasn't used to women folk, dear, or at least to ladies, and when she came home to me, I was afeard we shouldna' get on very well. But bless you, she was about your heart in no time. And then, just when I'd got used to her, an' fond of her like, and was going to have company, and all them tom-fooleries, to please her, she began to ail, and in the spring, when the flowers were beginning to bloom, she faded away and died. I was disappinted, deary! it was so contrairylike. But then she left her boy wi' me, and I swore I'd be a father to him. Ay! poor little Tommy! such a fine beautiful boy he was; you never see his like. *I* never did. An' such a doer. He was a Burton every inch of him, especially his appetite." And the old man stared away into the fire, thinking of what

a rare doer little Tommy had been when he sat at his uncle's table. "Deary me, how the time does slip away!" he continued. "When I saw little Tommy last, he was sitting at that very table—quite a little chap. And now he must be quite a grown-up lad. Ay! sure he must. He'll be five-and-twenty, or thereabouts. You don't think th' hard old Squire could love a little bit of a boy, do you, deary? And yet I did, I tell 'ee. That boy was the apple of my eye. I schemed for him, an' worked for him, an' maybe was down on a few people pretty sharpish, all because I loved my little Tommy. But there was them as owed me a bad turn, deary, and maybe, when my nevvy comes home again, I'll pay 'em off wi' interest too. An' they set my ricks afire one night, an' there was such a blaze here as was never seen afore in this part, I can tell 'ee. There were fourteen ricks in th' yard, an' every one of 'em was blazing at the same minute. But they made a mistake there, deary; I was insured for th' full value, he! he! he!" And the Squire chuckled at the idea of having been insured, and the smoke went the wrong way, and he almost choked. But presently recovering himself, and wiping his eyes, he went on: "But the varmints knew where to hit one hardest after all. My Tommy was asleep in his room—th' same as you have, deary—safe enough when the fire broke out, but he was gone when we went to see for him in the morning. They said he had come out to see the fire, and had fallen into th' river and was drowned; and they dragged th' stream for miles, but it was no use. *He* never got in th' river. And I hunted th' country all over,

and offered rewards and a' that, but 'twas no manner o' use; them as took him were as deep as the old one. And so I've waited an' hoped for twenty year that my Tommy 'll come back again. An' so he will; I'm certain o' that. He'll come back again, an' I mean to live to see him, I tell 'ee, deary. I *won't* die until my nevvy comes home. I've had two rubs for it—one when th' four-year-old came back over me, and th' other this very night. But I *won't* die until my nevvy comes home."

This narrative had deeply interested Marion. She was interested in the old man's tenacity of purpose, and in his unbounded faith. But besides that, she had a vague feeling that somehow or other she herself was playing a part in this little drama. For a long time past she had felt some such feeling. The Squire's name always struck a chord in her heart, but she had never been able to trace that feeling to its course. It was stronger on her now than ever. She felt that some revelation was about to be made, —something in which she had a profound interest revealed. And so she said, "But, sir, suppose your nephew should return, or that some one else should personate him, how could you tell the true heir from the impostor."

The old man looked at her, and his eyes twinkled, and he chuckled with unconcealed gratification. "I was afeard some o' their devilries would be played!" he replied. "My little Tommy was more to me than the ricks, though I do admire them too. But I loved my nevvy, and fearing they might try to strike me through him, I marked him with a mark I'll swear to before all the world; and the parson

and his wife can swear to it, and so could old Gaunt the lawyer, only he's dead. I marked him on th' shoulder, and I'd swear to th' mark at th' day o' judgment, I would."

She was standing up now with clasped hands, and looking on the Squire with wild eyes. "The mark! the mark!" she almost screamed. "Tell me what was the mark?"

"His initials, T. B," shouted the Squire, with a laugh, rising as though nothing ailed him, and dashing his pipe into a hundred fragments on the hearth. "Tom Burton is my nephew, and you know him!"

"I do! I do!" she cried. "Oh, I know him! I know my dear. I know my dear—the noblest—the best. And he'll come back again, I know he will. Oh, I know my dear 'll come back again." And then she cried and sobbed, and laughed, and cried again, and kissed the old Squire's hands and his cheeks, all in the wildest manner possible.

But the Squire did not give way to any such wildness after the first burst. He was made of sterner stuff. So he patted her head, and sank feebly back in his chair again, and closed his eyes and dozed. And presently waking up, he broke into a loud laugh, and slapped his knee with his feeble old hand, and said, "Scored the odd trick, by Jove!"

CHAPTER XIX.

It was late that night before either the Squire or Marion left the dining-room. He insisted on hearing everything she could tell him of his nephew, and to her the relation was a pleasing task. She told him of what she knew of his early troubles, of his marriage, and the subsequent events already related in this history, of his honour and nobleness. To her there had never been such a noble-hearted gentleman before. And the Squire believed all she told him. It was his nephew she was praising—his heir. And nothing too good could be told of him. And the old man chuckled, and rubbed his feeble hands together, and said, "Ay! ay! lass; that be my little Tommy, surely. And he's a big lad now, and away in Australia. Well, we must have him back directly. Directly, deary, do you hear? We must have little Tommy home at once. And we'll have some fine doings then, I warrant."

"It will be a long time yet before he can return," she said. "A long, weary time. He must be found, and even then the journey is so great, and the time it takes to perform so long."

"Not much, deary! A few months, or may be a year!" the old man replied. "It's nothing. A

year is soon gone, especially with an old man. And I've waited twenty year! think o' that. Twenty long and weary year I've waited and hoped. I'll last out until Tommy comes home, I will, surely! I won't die afore I see my nevvy. But you must go off and see his friend directly. If he can't go, I'll send a lawyer or a policeman, I will. We must ha' him back, my dear, and very soon."

You may be sure Marion was quite as eager as the Squire to see Sam start in search of Tom. It might, perhaps, have been just as well if they had sent a gentleman from Bow Street, or some one from Mr. Pollaky's private inquiry office. But then we must remember, that people labouring under great mental excitement are apt to set about their affairs in an unbusiness-like manner, and let their hearts run off with their heads. What more proper than that Sam should be the chosen one to go in search of his friend? In her opinion, he was without doubt the most proper person. And then, in her journey to London the following day, her mind could dwell on nothing but the wrongs Tom had suffered; and suffered too through her—her—who would have suffered anything for him. It was terrible, she thought. For *her* sake, he had been stolen from his home, and undergone all these misfortunes. There was a heavy load on her. It was crushing her heart And she continued to torture herself in the most exquisite manner, and had made up her mind, by the time the train had arrived at Paddington, that to undo as much as possible of what had been done, to make reparation to him who had suffered so much, it was her duty to sacrifice herself, forgetting the

while that should her sacrifice be accepted, she would wound him deeper than ever.

But we all know that when the heart is in a state of perturbation, especially the female heart, reason is kicked off her throne and sent about her business. And in this state Marion presented herself at Sam's lodgings, and found that young gentleman wearing an elaborately curled wig, and looking considerably better than she had anticipated, and, it must be confessed, not at all unhappy. When she entered the room, she found a young lady sitting by the bedside reading "Vanity Fair," and Sam leaning on one elbow, and laughing quite jovially. He blushed when he saw his visitor, for his wig had been tickling his head, and in rubbing the place, he had pushed that work of art on one side, by which misfortune a bunch of bristles showed themselves, for Sam's hair had started growing again. And then he held out a rather thin hand, and said, "How de do, Marion? Rum start this, ain't it? Couldn't do Romeo now to save my life! he! he!" She thought she would send him a nail-brush on Valentine's Day, which was near. And then she kissed Polly Wright, for that was the young lady who had been reading the loves of the amorous Jos, and then, having as we have before remarked, worked herself up to boiling-point, she at once plunged into the middle of her tale.

"He, Tom, had been suffering grievous wrong all his life. He had been followed with the most implacable hatred. His uncle was found. Yes! found, Sam! and he is heir to an old estate, and he, poor dear, suffering," and all the rest of it. Sam

was deeply interested in her tale. Tom, a real born country gentleman, with ever so much a year and a fine estate! and he, Sam Maggs, or Mr. Seymour Beaufort, that gentleman's friend! "Gad!" thought Sam. "When he comes back again, I shall be an honoured guest in his ancestral halls, and shall mix in the very best society when I visit him." And these visions occupied Sam's brain until Marion at the end of her tale, with a hysterical sob, and a jerk of her heart-strings, took his hand in hers, forgetting all about the valentine she thought of sending him, and said, "You will go out for him, Sam. You promised me you would go out for him. Only do this, and I'll—I'll do—what you asked of me that night you were taken ill."

And Sam blushed to a deep crimson, and in his confusion knocked his wig over one ear. And then he stammered, "Thanky, Marion! I'm much obliged, I'm sure. But—eh—I'd rather not, if convenient. The fact is—ah—that is to say—don't you see, you mustn't go for to do it. Couldn't think of it at no price. I don't mean that I won't go after Tom, because I will as soon as I can put my—ah—things on, you know. But I couldn't go for to do the other. In other words," continued Sam, growing bolder, and taking the blushing Polly's hand in his, "me and Polly have squared it, don't you see."

A woman never likes to lose an admirer, even though she may be head and ears in love with another. Marion was but a woman after all, you know, and just for a moment she felt disappointed. It is just possible—I will not say it actually was so—but it was just possible she would have liked to

have pulled off that lovely wig and beaten it about the wearer's head, for being unfaithful to his profession of everlasting devotion. It was but for a moment though, and the next she began to laugh, and kissed Polly again with the prettiest patronising air possible, as though she would have said, "There, you little goose, I *give* him to you." But Sam was perfectly cured of his infatuation for Marion. He had awakened the morning after his last interview with her, raging in the delirium of fever. But when the fever had spent itself and left him, his love had died a natural death. And then he had found Polly by his bedside, nursing him, and waiting on him with pity and tenderness. If pity is akin to love, surely gratitude is its first cousin. Sam was grateful to his pretty little nurse, and was continually repeating Scott's lines, "Oh! woman, in our hours of ease," and his ministering angel was quite willing to take the vacant place in his heart, and so, to use Sam's own words, they had squared it that morning.

While they were talking, Mr. and Mrs. Maggs came into the room, and Marion had to tell her tale over again. They always knew Tom was a born gentleman, they declared. And he, poor dear, was stolen away from his home, etc. etc. And so it was arranged that Sam, who indeed had been ordered by his doctor to go on a sea voyage for the perfect re-establishment of his health, should go to Australia, and bring Tom home again. And about a month after this, a group of people stood under the Hoe at Plymouth, watching a boat on its way to the Australian clipper, the *Viking*, waiting in the

Sound for her passengers. And Mr. Maggs waved his hat and gave a parting cheer, and Mrs. Maggs, and Polly, and Marion waved their handkerchiefs, when they could spare them from wiping their eyes. And there they stood until the sails of the *Viking* were unfurled, and the noble ship slowly made her way out of the Sound, and stood down the channel, while Mr. Seymour Beaufort, the eminent tragedian, stood on the poop looking shorewards, until certain qualms beneath his waistcoat warned him that it was about time to turn in, and make the acquaintance of the steward.

The *Viking* was bound for Sydney, from which port Sam intended to go by steamship to Brisbane. But when he had arrived at the capital of New South Wales, his exchequer was in a most exhausted condition. He had started from England with two hundred pounds in his pocket, a sum quite sufficient, he thought, to enable him to prosecute his search after Tom. But a long sea voyage is often tedious, and continual play at three-card loo expensive, unless you have the happiness always to hold a good hand of trumps, which, it is needless to say, Sam did not. And so, when they arrived at Sydney, Sam was on his beam ends, and had to borrow five pounds for his immediate wants from a fellow passenger, who indeed could well afford it, having won most of his money. But Sydney possessed a theatre, and an enterprising manager, and Sam had provided himself with letters of introduction and testimonials before he left home. The result was that that city was covered with flaming posters, announcing that Mr. Seymour Beaufort

would appear for a few nights only, and one of these posters was hanging in the confectioner's shop into which Mr. Eversley, and Mr. Seedly, and Tom went that blazing hot day to eat ices.

There was a full house that night. As the *New South Wales Chronicle* wrote, all the beauty and fashion of Sydney were there, for the great Mr. Seymour Beaufort was not only from the London boards, but was a star of the first magnitude. Moreover, Sam had enveloped his appearance with some degree of romance. Never at any time being of a reticent disposition, he had informed those gentlemen in whose company he had partaken of cooling drinks at his hotel, that he was among them in the cause of friendship. That he had come to find, and restore to his friends, the heir to one of the largest estates in England. He did not mention the exact rental of the estates to which his friend—his bosom friend, he informed them—was heir, but he intimated it was perhaps a little less than those of the Duke of Westminster or the Marquis of Bute. "Me bosom friend, the companion of me childhood," Sam had stated, with a great deal of expression, "was spirited away from his home. I will not say by whom, or for what purpose. I will not say it is probable it will cause the overthrow of the present British Ministry. But gentlemen, here I am, in the cause of friendship, and I have much pleasure in drinking your healths," which it is needless to say he did very often in the course of those hot and thirsty days, and equally thirsty nights. Our cousins in Australia are as expert with the long bow as—we will not say our

American cousins, for they are unapproachable in the use of their favourite weapon—but as ourselves. They are very fair archers indeed, and before Sam had appeared before them half a dozen times, the few fibs with which he had embellished the truth respecting his journey had been improved on in the course of retailing, until they had assumed the form of a history of the most circumstantial character, which would easily fill a three volume novel. We say, then, the house on that particular night was crowded. Tom and his companions had engaged their seats before the commencement of the performance. They were a little late when they arrived at the theatre, for in the afternoon they had to transact some business, which had detained them longer than they had anticipated, and when they took their places in the front row of the boxes, the ghost had just entered, in the fourth scene of the first act. Mr. Wigsby, the great colonial tragedian, sustained the part of Horatio. We cannot say that Mr. Wigsby had as yet achieved a world-wide reputation, but he was great in Sydney, and always made it a practice to act at his audience, and address all his remarks to them. When the ghost came on the stage, Mr. Wigsby took no notice of the spirit of the Royal Dane, but seeing three gentlemen, two of whom would excite attention in almost any society, just seat themselves in their box, he pointed to them, and said in most dolorous tones, "Look, my lord, it comes!" And Hamlet, following Horatio's eyes, gave a sudden start, and said, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" and then forsook the text, and added, "By heavens, 'tis he!" But here

he stopped. In vain the prompter took up the lines and swore behind the curtains. Hamlet could not go on. His eyes were fixed on the front boxes, and in a moment the whole house was looking the same way. This all took place in less than a minute, but Tom and his companions found it sufficiently uncomfortable, and they rose and left their places. At the door a note was slipped into Tom's hand by the call-boy. "Come round to my dressing-room," it said.

When they reached the green-room, Sam nearly wrung Tom's hand off. "I've only a moment," he said; "there's Horatio and the ghost both waiting for me, to say nothing of the people who've paid their money," which indeed was sufficiently apparent by the noise they made. "So come along, old feller and gentlemen, into the stage box, and I'll go on and finish the Prince of Denmark."

By the time Sam had again made his appearance on the stage—and he had only been absent a few minutes—all the house was aware that the younger of the gentlemen who were seating themselves in the stage box was the heir to those vast estates which Sam, and all who had repeated the story, had lied so barefacedly about, and they good-naturedly gave Hamlet a round of applause, but very little of their attention afterwards. And their eyes and opera glasses were levelled at the stage box, and Mr. Wigsby groaned, and eventually died at it, and the actresses ogled it, and everybody wondered whether Tom was a lord or a viscount, and never once thought, nor would have believed, had you told them, that in his youth he had assisted Mr. Maggs in

sweeping chimneys. These loyal Sydney folks were real Britons, every man of them, and had the real old English—we will not say snobbishness, for the word is an unpleasant one—but the real genuine old English admiration of wealth and wealthy people. And hadn't the great Mr. Beaufort said he was not quite as rich as the Duke of Westminster, but almost? And hadn't they heard that the tall gentleman with him, to whom he bore such an astonishing likeness, was worth half a million? And so a committee of gentlemen was formed in the bar of the hotel which Sam patronised, after the performance was over, and a deputation, preceded by a brass band playing "Old England for ever," and other patriotic airs, went to their hotel with the intention of welcoming them to the queen of cities, their own Sydney.

While Sam was changing his dress in his dressing-room, the manager and lessee of the theatre, who had just been at the bar where the "welcome committee" was sitting, or rather standing, came and told him how matters stood. And that gentleman, being as much of a genuine Briton as any of them, said, "Your friends will have a lively time of it if they go to their hotel for the next three hours, for they will have to liquor up and shake hands with every man of them separately. So you had better all come home and have supper with me and my missus." This invitation they gratefully accepted, to the great delight of the manager, who ever after spoke of that time when "me and my missus entertained at our humble board three members of the English peerage, by Jove, sir, and it's no lie I'm

telling you," and lied harder and harder every year on the subject, both to new colonists and old friends. It may also be mentioned that, during the few hours they spent in his society, he would persist in addressing Tom as "my lord," although his lordship with much laughter assured him he was no more a lord than he, the manager, was. This was rather uncomfortable at first to Sam, who thought of the fibs he had told of his friend's station at home. But the manager replied, "Certainly, my lord! Incog. of course," and winked on Sam, who winked back again, as much as to say, "Humour him. These lords and marquises like occasionally to drop their titles, and go about like ordinary people. But *we* know what o'clock it is."

At length they rose to depart, their host insisting, however, on seeing them safe to their hotel. When they were in the quiet of their own rooms at last, Tom said, "Now, Sam, old boy, what brings you out here? We thought you were astonishing all London with your acting, and instead of that we find you in Sydney."

"It's all through you!" Sam replied. "I came out to search for you. We thought you were lost in the bush or some such unpleasant place, and without referring to myself in any way, there are those at home who are anxious to see you again, old feller. In fact, there's the deuce to pay. But why couldn't you let us know where you were? It would have saved a lot of heartburning, I can tell you."

"I wrote from Brisbane as soon as I arrived," Tom said.

"That's all right enough, old feller. You said

you were going some hundreds of miles into the bush to some place or other, but you did not say where a letter might reach you," Sam replied.

"Why, my dear Sam, I wrote you all from Tangaboora!" Tom said.

"Never heard of such a place before," Sam observed. "The letters must have been stolen. You didn't enclose any postage stamps, did you? Letters enclosing postage stamps frequently get lost, even at home, where postal arrangements one may naturally suppose are better than here!"

"No, I did not. But I wrote you all from my uncle's place, and never received an answer," Tom said.

"Well! it's no use crying about it now. I didn't come out because the letters were lost, but because you're wanted, old feller," said Sam. "We know all about your goings on as a lad, and we've found your disconsolate relative—your uncle. Or at least, Marion has!"

Tom's heart gave a great thump against his ribs, and then stood still.

"What uncle do you mean, Sam?" inquired Mr. Seedly, firing up at the thought of Tom having any more uncles, and never thinking at the moment of the lad's history. "Mr. Eversley here is his uncle, and hang it all, I'm his uncle. He's got no others."

"Oh, but he has!" Sam replied, wagging his head. "There is an uncle and a good estate waiting for him down at a place called Orleton. Now try and recollect, old feller! Did you ever have an uncle called John Burton?—Squire Burton, of Orleton Manor?"

"Why, it's his father's brother!" said Mr. Eversley, banging the table with his hand. "Tom, you can call to mind your having lived with old Burton, can't you?"

"Perfectly!" Tom answered, trembling all over. "But I never thought to have heard of him again. I had forgotten even his name, and the name of the place, until you recalled it to my memory."

"Then you'll have to come home with me!" said Sam. "There's Marion—you remember Marion, Tom?"

Tom replied that he did remember her. Heavens! was she not always present to him? Did he ever for a moment forget her? Was she not the loadstone to which the needle of his heart always pointed? "Yes, he remembered Marion," he replied.

"Well, she's down at Orleton with the old Squire," Sam said. "It was she who found it all out, and packed me off to see for you, and bring you back. So you'll have to come along o' me."

"Gad, Tom, my boy, fortune is making amends now for the kicking she gave us some time ago!" the little man said.

"It certainly is," Tom answered. "I recollect what you said on the subject once before—it never rains but it pours. And, as far as my experience goes, you are right."

"Now then, old feller!" said Sam, who appeared under the impression he must not lose sight of his friend, now he had found him; "are you coming along o' me, or must I take you?"

Mr. Eversley looked on the two young fellows, and burst into a laugh. The idea of Sam taking

his nephew forcibly was something amusing. "You can't start to-night, can you, Mr. Beaufort?" he said.

"No, sir! but the mail leaves in a week, and if I lose sight of him again, he may slip through my fingers. I'll stick to him until I get him on board," Sam replied, determinedly. "Now, Tom, will you come along o' me?"

"No, you old humbug, I won't," Tom replied, laughing.

"Very well then, old feller! I don't wish to make a disturbance in a respectable house by forcibly carrying you off, so I'll send round for my traps in the morning, and remain here with you," said Sam. "So let's have another soda, and something to qualify it."

The next morning Sam sent home a telegram, which, though it consisted of but four words, carried joy into some half dozen hearts which had been very sorrowful. Those words were: "Found. Sail next week."

CHAPTER XX.

One day in the early part of May, the old Squire and Marion sat at the window of the dining-room at the Manor House, from which they could command a view of the drive leading up to the house from the Baswold road. There appeared to be a good deal of suppressed excitement about the place, for not only were the occupants of the dining-room continually rising and looking with expectation down the drive, but the servants were neglecting their duties, and hanging about at corners and odd places, from which they could obtain a view of the road.

For the fiftieth time the Squire said, "Read the telegram again, deary! What time did they say they'd be here?"

"They will be here about five o'clock," Marion replied; "and it's four o'clock now. They must have left Baswold by this time, sir."

And then they both watched the drive again, for the wanderers were that day coming home. Presently, Mr. Althorpe and his wife drove up. The Squire had sent for them that afternoon, that they might be present when the heir arrived, and recognise the mark which had been put on him.

"How de do, parson? How de do, ma'am?" the

Squire said. "I be glad you're come. You'll recognise my nevvy, I'll be bound. You remember how I drove him over to your house, to show you the mark I had put on him? I've got th' paper you signed in th' drawer still, I have."

"I've no doubt at all, Squire, but we shall know him again," Mr. Althorpe answered. "Both Mrs. Althorpe and I remember the circumstance perfectly, and I think we could swear to the mark. Could we not, my dear?"

"I am certain *I* could!" Mrs. Althorpe replied.

"I'm glad o' that! I'm main glad o' that!" said the Squire, fidgeting in his chair. "I knew my nevvy would come back, and I've waited and hoped for this minute now twenty year. What time is it now, deary?"

"It only wants a few minutes to five, Squire," Mr. Althorpe said. For though Marion had, with trembling hands, taken out her watch, yet for the life of her she could not have spoken a word. She was pale and cold, and hot and red, alternately, and the excitement she was under was almost too much for her strength.

And then the sound of wheels on the gravel was heard, and old Ben, with his white hair streaming about his head, rushed into the room, and said breathlessly, "Ay, Squire! what be glowering at there fur? Her's coomin, I tell thee!" and then rushed out again.

And looking out of the window, they saw a carriage and pair drive up, in which were seated Tom and Mr. Eversley, and little Mr. Seedly, and the great Mr. Seymour Beaufort, otherwise Sam Maggs, while

a thickset, broken-nosed, elderly man, sat by the driver on the box.

Mr. Althorpe took upon himself the task of welcoming them. But old Ben was before him. He hobbled to the carriage door, and let down the steps, and then, shading his rheumy old eyes with his hand, looked earnestly at Tom, and said in a faltering voice, "Do 'ee remember me, sur?"

Tom looked at the old man, and then at the house, as Memory was fighting for the mastery with Time. But, after a moment, Memory won, and he recollected all he saw before him. And then he replied quietly, "You are old Ben, are you not?"

During the moment of hesitation, the old man was looking wistfully up into the brown, handsome face of the young fellow, hoping, yet fearing. But when Tom said, "You are old Ben, are you not?" his eyes gleamed, and two or three drops of water rolled down his furrowed old cheeks, and he took the lad's hand in his and kissed it, saying, "Th' Lard be praised! A' knowed auld Ben, a' did. An' I'd swear to un, I would, s'elp me God!"

And then the parson shook hands with them all, though he knew neither of them, and said, "Welcome, gentlemen, every one of you. And to *you*, sir," he added, addressing Tom, "I believe I may say, welcome *home!* But come this way! the Squire is waiting, and a certain young lady is waiting, and old men and young ladies have the privilege of being impatient."

And then they all entered the house, and every one of the servants, with the driver, went to the kitchen to drink a welcome to the heir in copious

draughts of cider, leaving the broken-nosed man alone on the box. And then he swung himself down, and as he did so he became aware that a tall, swarthy man, of about his own age, with a deep cut extending from his brow to his cheek-bone, was watching him. And they stood staring at each other for just two minutes, when the tall, swarthy fellow said, "Devils! here's the Chicken come back with the kinchin."

And the Chicken replied, "I believe you, Gabriel, my boy! Now, what's your little game?"

Gabriel looked at the Chicken for a moment, and then said in a rather sheepish manner, as though he were thoroughly ashamed of himself, "I owe the kinchin a good turn. He's a rare bred dog, isn't he? And the old bull-dog by his side, Gabriel knows him too. Devils! what a fighter he was! Ay, and the young one too! I've seen the young one fight; and he could give you a stone, and beat your head off, even in your best days, Chicken. And Gabriel knows more of those in there than anyone else, and may be wanted."

"Then let's get in the trap, and have a smoke until we're sent for," said the Chicken.

While the Chicken and Gabriel were smoking in the carriage outside, a different kind of scene was taking place in the dining-room. Tom's heart was beating away like a sledge-hammer when he entered that room, and he recognised the wainscoting, and the grim old portraits, and he was as pale as any person whose face was tanned to the colour of mahogany could be. And then he flushed to the roots of his hair, and his soul gushed out at his

eyes, when Marion rushed towards him, and quite regardless of who were present, threw herself on his broad chest, and wrapped her arms about his neck, and entwined her long, lithe fingers in each other, as she cried, "My dear is come back! Oh, my dear is come home again! My darling! my darling! and no one shall take him from me again."

And then the old Squire tottered towards him, as Tom placed her tenderly on the sofa, for she was weeping hysterically now. And the old man looked with those bright eyes of his in the lad's face, and then began, with trembling, eager hands, and cheeks all white, to unfasten his coat. "Strip him! strip him!" he said in excited tones. "Strip him an' let me see the mark."

And Tom threw off his coat and vest, and bared his shoulder, as white as marble, and whiter when contrasted with his tanned neck and face. And there were the letters T.B. as plain and distinct as on the day the Squire had put them there, twenty years before.

"Parson, be that th' mark? be that th' mark, ma'am?" the old man said, with a wonderful mixture of pride, and triumph, and tenderness. "There's th' paper both o' you signed, and that old Gaunt, the lawyer, signed. Be that th' mark?"

"I have no doubt of it," Mr. Althorpe replied. "Indeed, I would swear to it."

"And so would I!" his wife said.

Then the old man drew himself up to his full height, and in the triumph of the moment, and the consummation of the hopes of twenty long and weary years, while his bright old eyes gleamed, he

shook his clenched hand at the grim portraits of his ancestors hanging on the walls, and to the astonishment of all present, said, "Liars all! liars every one of you! I am not the last of my race, for here is a young oak, and we'll graft on him another lovely branch, and they shall bloom and throw out new shoots to the glory and honour of this house."

And then he turned to the lad, and reached up his feeble old hand and patted him on his head, and said, "An' th'art come home at last, Tommy! th' old uncle has waited a weary time for thee, but th'art come at last. An' th'art grown to a big lad. But give me th' arm, Tommy, an' lead me to my chair. I be getting old and a'most done up now. But I said I'd live to see thee again, and I have seen thee. An' I'll see thee wed, too, afore I die, I will."

And Tom led him towards his seat—age leaning on youth. But before the Squire had sat down, another figure appeared on the scene, and he knew her in a moment, although her face was muffled in her veil.

"Deary me!" he said, chuckling. "Thee here again; th'art a bold woman, I will say. But I'll not quarrel with thee in th' moment of triumph. No! no! go your ways! go your ways!"

And Madam Zulmann lifted up her veil, and disclosed her face, which was now pale and haggard. Either remorse or disappointment had left their mark on her. "I come to you in your hour of triumph," she said, "not to upbraid you, nor to rail at my own ill-luck, for all this has been ruled

before you or I were born. It is Destiny. I have come to tell you, if the evidence you have of this person being your nephew wants confirmation, that I can confirm it. He is your nephew. I shall oppose him no longer, for it is useless striving against fate."

"Nay, lass! we can do without thy evidence," the Squire replied, chuckling. "My nevvy carries all th' evidence required on him. I can see as far as most people I tell 'ee, and had no need to consult the stars or sichlike stuff to tell me how to mark my own nevvy. No! no! go your ways."

"Then I will leave you and yours, John Burton," she said. "And this is no place for my daughter. Come Marion!"

But Marion was clinging to Tom for protection. She would not leave him, even were her mother different to what she was. And Madam Zulmann saw this, and her brow became black as night. "Does my child forsake me?" she said, almost fiercely. "Come!"

But in the meantime Gabriel had finished his pipe, and probably being of opinion it was time he should be wanted, he had walked to the window which opened out on the lawn, and entered the room just as Madam Zulmann had commanded Marion to follow her. And he nodded to Tom and said, "Gabriel remembers the night at Liverpool," and then turning to her, he placed his hand on her shoulder, and continued, "Nay! nay! hard woman. Cannot ye let things bide. Let her bide, I say. Let her bide."

"Dog" she fiercely replied, "take your hand off. I command my daughter to follow me."

"Nay! nay! woman, Gabriel doesn't fear thee. He'd as soon squeeze thy throttle as any other," Gabriel remarked. "I tell thee she's no child of thine."

"What's that, my lad?" asked Tom, eagerly. "Prove that, and you'll have earned my gratitude."

"Ay! ay! give the lad fair play," the Squire chuckled.

"He lies! the dog lies! She is my daughter," said Madam Zulmann, like a tiger at bay.

"I tell thee nay; Gabriel knows what he says. Can nobody steal a kinchin but yourself, you opinionated woman?"

"I tell you he lies," she persisted, glaring on the astonished spectators of this scene.

"Devils! but Gabriel says *no!*" that gentleman said. "The wizened little thing you left in the tents died, I say. And Gabriel himself took this one from the house where it was at nurse, and put it in the place of the dead kinchin."

"He lies! he lies!" she persisted as firmly as ever.

"Strike me dead if I lie! Here! what do you make of that, obstinate woman?" he said, as he took a small parcel from his breast, and dashed it on the table.

With trembling hands Mr. Seedly unfastened the packet, and unfolded a child's cambric night-dress. The little garment was slightly discoloured by age, but otherwise perfect. "Will you be good enough to

examine this, ma'am?" he said to Mrs. Althorpe. "You understand these things better than I do."

She took it from him and carefully examined it, while all in the room were silent and expectant. At length she said, "It is a child's night-dress, such as very young children of the better classes wear. And here is the name she was evidently christened by, marked in indelible ink. The name is 'Kate Wright.'"

"This is folly!" said Madam Zulmann, excitedly. "It is time to end it. I command my daughter to come with me."

"I think we had better wait a bit," Sam observed. "Now it happens that I have particular reasons, which I needn't mention here, for being interested in that name," and Sam blushed. "I perfectly well recollect my father having been with a gentleman of that name in his last moments. And just before he died, he declared he had reasons for believing his eldest daughter had been stolen in her infancy." And here he paused for a moment to allow the immense sensation his statement had made to subside. And then he continued, "My father wrote that gentleman's will, in which he left all his real and personal estate, consisting of—never mind what, to a young lady whose name needn't be mentioned. But in that will were enumerated certain signs by which that lost child might at any time be recognised." And then, turning to Mr. Seedly, he said, "Mr. Seedly, you have that will?"

"By Jove, so I have!" the little man replied, with astonishment. "I've got it in my writing-case

this minute, for it's deuced little poor Joe had to leave, beside a few——"

"Things which needn't be mentioned," interrupted Sam.

"Exactly so!" continued the little man. "I've got the case down in the carriage now. Well, that's lucky! I'll run and fetch it."

In a few moments he returned, and opening the writing case, brought forth that eccentric will which Mr. Maggs had made. "Here ma'am," said the little man, blushing, "you had better retire with the young lady, and let us hear the result as soon as convenient."

Mrs. Althorpe glanced at the description of those marks by which the child would be known. "I think," she said, handing it to her husband, "it will be better to make that examination here in the presence of us all. It is only the left foot and ankle."

"I think so too," said the parson. "Let me read the words: 'A mole on the inside of the left ankle; the little toe of the left foot absent.' Would you mind, my dear young lady, taking off your boot and stocking for a moment. This is a matter of the greatest consequence, you know."

Tremblingly she exposed to the gaze of all there the most beautifully-shaped little foot in the world, but the little toe was absent, and a mole was on the inside of the ankle.

Madam Zulmann for a few moments seemed dazed. She examined the marks and read their description on the will. "Curse you! you dog!" she hissed through her clenched teeth, as she passed Gabriel in moving towards the window.

"Nay, thou hard woman, it's no use; Gabriel cares as little for your curses as your blessings. But he owed the kinchin a good turn, and he owed *you* one, master," he continued, turning to Mr. Eversley. "I fought you fair that night;' 'twas the coward at the inn who struck you behind. I fought you fair, and you beat me."

"Gad! I thought I knew your face again!" replied Mr. Eversley with a grim smile.

But Madam Zulmann had reached the window, and turning once more, she said, "Farewell, John Burton. I shall trouble you no more; I have played my game and lost."

"Ay, that you have, lass!" replied the Squire with a chuckle. "Thou'st lost, sure enough. And we've won—ay woman, we've won two trebles and the rub."

And then she went out into the night, and away over the hills, and out on the moor. And by-and-by, the rain clouds gathered in black masses, and the heavens opened, and the rain came down, and the brooks became rivers, and the rivers roaring torrents. And away out on the bleak moor the Leddon came raging down and ran over its banks, and swept away sheep and cattle. And weeks after, miles down its course, the body of a woman was found, but too far gone in a state of decomposition to be recognised. But after that night, no one ever saw Marion the Gipsy, or Madam Zulmann.

CHAPTER XXI.

And now we come to the last act of the play. In it we shall bring all our characters on the stage, and inform our audience, who we trust have felt some small interest in their fortunes, which of them were happy ever after, and which of them were not.

One day, about a month after the exile's return, the church bells at Orleton began at an unconscionably early hour to ring out peal after peal of merry music. And the old church was decorated with evergreens, and there were triumphal arches all the way from the Manor House. And at eleven o'clock precisely a number of carriages drove up, with two bridegrooms and their friends. And soon after other carriages arrived with the brides and *their* bevy of attendants. And the parson first pronounced the blessing on Tom and Marion—we cannot bring ourselves at the last moment to call her Kate—and then on Sam and Polly. And then, the ringers having refreshed themselves in the rectory kitchen, the bells rang out again clearer, and livelier, and jollier than ever, and seemed as though, in their excitement up there in the dark old belfry, they were tumbling in a wild medley heels

over head, and over each other. And the schoolmaster, who played the harmonium in church on Sundays, tried his hand at the Wedding March, and after wandering off into about half a dozen other airs, broke down, and laid the blame on the instrument.

And then the carriages rolled off to the Manor House in such a lively manner that one could almost swear the horses which were harnessed to them entered into the spirit of the affair. But the breakfast! what pen can describe that? There were sober country gentlemen and their wives, to whom that adjective could not be applied when they took their leave, and their sons and their daughters. And there were Dick Althorpe, who was Tom's second best man, for Mr. Seedly was *the* groomsman, and the theatrical gentlemen—and such jovial, funny fellows they were too, keeping the whole table in a roar—who had come down to see the great Mr. Seymour Beaufort turned off in a becoming manner. And there were Mr. and Mrs. Eversley, and the parson and his wife, and Mr. Maggs, with an enormous bunch of flowers pinned in his buttonhole, and *his* wife. And then there were such speeches as were never listened to before. Everybody there present made a speech and took wine separately with each other, irrespective of emptying bumpers to every one of the numerous toasts, except the Squire, who, at an early period, on the plea of his failing health, retired to the bedroom his little Tommy had occupied twenty years ago. And there he sat in company with old Ben, for whom he had sent, and quite oblivious of the

room being a bedroom, they smoked their long pipes, and the Squire chuckled, and told of how "he had waited twenty long years for his nevvy to come home, and how he had scored two trebles an' th' rub."

And by-and-by the happy pairs posted to Baswold, and took the express to London, for Sam was to have a benefit that night at the Theatre Royal, and Marion and he were to appear, the former for the last time before the public. And everyone there knew that their favourite was married that day, and would delight them on those boards no more. And Sam and Marion were called before the curtain nine times, and the stage was strewed with bouquets thrown from all parts of the house, and a chaplet of pearls was afterwards presented to Tom's wife in the green room, in the names of those among whom she had laboured, and whose triumphs she had shared.

And now the next few months passed rapidly away. The Raddleton Court estate not having met with a purchaser, Mr. Eversley eventually became the owner, and began to expend large sums in carrying out those improvements which Mr. Seedly had carried out *in his mind*. And the new stables were built, though Mr. Eversley did not take his friend's advice, and start a pack of hounds, for the country was hunted already, and that gentleman very wisely thought he could have as much fun with somebody else's hounds as with his own, and at a considerably cheaper rate. And the covers were preserved, and the Chicken was appointed as a sort of supernumerary gamekeeper. But some time

after he had entered on his office, he came to his master, and informed him, "that somehow or other he couldn't be virtuous in this country, though he tried very hard. That everybody knew he had been lagged, and some of his old pals had found him out, and were pressing him to join them in stealing his master's game. And that he thought he had better go back to Australia, where a great many gentlemen who had left their country for their country's good resided with considerable honour, and where one man was as good as another, if not better, and that Gabriel would accompany him."

Mr. Eversley did not oppose this laudable resolution, and the Chicken and Gabriel were enabled, through the generosity of that gentleman and Tom, to become joint proprietors of a public-house in Melbourne, where at the present time you can obtain lessons in the noble art, make a match, fight a main of cocks, or back your bull-terrier, if you have one, to kill so many rats against time, or anybody else's bull-terrier.

Mr. and Mrs. Maggs now thought the time had come when they might retire from business, and they joyfully accepted Tom's offer of a pretty cottage near the old Manor House at Orleton, where for many years afterwards Mr. Maggs's word was law on all professional matters.

And the old Squire, having first declared he would not die until Tom came home again, and then put it off until his "nevvy was wed," eventually declared his intention of living until he saw the blossoming of the rose. And such was his remarkable strength

of will, that he *did* actually live until Tom's eldest boy was receiving lessons in the dead languages from Mr. Drust, who had been induced to bring his library down to Orleton, and become the lad's tutor, and there were three other little Burtons between that stage and long clothes.

Before Tom's return from his wedding tour, Mr. Seedly, at his request, paid off the mortgage on the Moat estate, and the house becoming vacant just then, the little man had it refurnished, with the intention of dividing his time between his old home, and Orleton Manor, and Raddleton Court. Tom had written from Paris to say that he should bring his wife on direct to The Moat before they returned to Orleton, and in due time they arrived, after taking Liverpool in their way for the purpose of showing Marion over the workhouse in which Tom had spent his early years, and in which Mr. Ebenezer Fuller and his wife were once more inmates, though holding no offices as they had done in the old time now passed away. And Mrs. Barker, formerly Miss Spring, and her husband, being at the head of that establishment, it will not be wondered at if poor Ebby had some reason to groan in the bitterness of his spirit. "He could not help murmuring sometimes," he informed Tom. "He tried not to murmur, for he had been converted. He had repented, oh! so sincerely. There were others who had not repented. There is that villain Parkes, sir, who tempted me to sin. But never mind, sir! Cheer up, sir! he's a raving maniac in the pauper ward of the Lunatic Asylum, sir. Very horrible, isn't it, sir? But it's a great consolation to me.

Yet I can't help murmuring sometimes. Even the most moral and religious man in the world," he said, "if he had a stomach as was a stomach, would murmur at skilly. Skilly was all very well for them as never had any better; but for a man as had been brought up as he had been brought up—— Thank you, sir! Ebby—the converted Ebby—will remember you in his prayers, sir!" And here we will leave Mr. Fuller and his wife, fully agreeing with them, that they were not at all rewarded according to their deserts.

By this time everybody knew that Mr. Seedly had come home again, and was wealthier than ever. He had no fear of the creditors of the Utopian Bank, for when the affairs of that company were wound up, the sum of nine hundred pounds out of the sixty thousand he had invested, was placed to the little man's credit. And now he was richer than ever. Rumour had kindly placed a nought after the numerals representing his wealth, making him ten times richer than he really was. Indeed, it is always so. Rumour always will have it to be you are ten times richer, or ten times wickeder, or ten times better than you are, but especially ten times wickeder.

After Lord Fillyoakes and Sir Thomas Oldacre had called on their old neighbour—for whom, indeed, they entertained great respect—you may be sure the Bogeys, and other county people of similar standing, called on him too, and received him with open arms as a county man and a brother.

On the day after the arrival of Tom and his beautiful wife, Mr. and Mrs. Maggs being in the house at the time, a broken-kneed old screw shambled up to

the hall-door, painfully dragging after it a carriage, as rickety as itself. Scarcely had the driver descended from his seat, when a young heavy-looking gentleman galloped up on a spavined hunter, which had been badly fired for curbs.

Mr. Seedly had the week before engaged a gentleman to do nothing in particular but look out of the window all day, in strict evening costume—a solemn, pompous gentleman—who on this occasion condescended to announce the visitors. The little man, and Tom and Marion, and Mr. and Mrs. Maggs, were in the drawing-room, forming various plans for the future, with which we have nothing to do here, when the butler—he called himself the butler—threw open the door and announced, "Mrs. Revell and Mr. Bogey!"

Now, although they thought it possible that many of those who had given them the cold shoulder in the days of their adversity would, now the sun of prosperity shone on them, claim their acquaintance and friendship, yet they were not prepared for this. They were amazed and confounded, and before they had recovered themselves, Mrs. Revell had rushed forward and seized on one of Tom's hands, while Mr. Bogey clasped the other.

"Oh! my dear dear Tom! my dear son-in-law, welcome back to the halls of your ancestors. Oh, that my darling Constance, your dear first, could have lived to see this moment," said the old woman.

"Ay! by Gad! old feller, this *is* a treat," roared Mr. Bogey, squeezing his dear friend's hand in his. "As soon as ever I heard you had come back, by Gad, I galloped my thoroughbred mare, a splendid hunter,

sound as—as any I ever had, and just up to your weight. I galloped her over. Says I to her ladyship and to my brother the baronet—you remember my brother the baronet—says I, Seedly is come back again, and he's a county man, and damme, as a county man I'll stick to him. And so I will, old feller, by Gad."

The little man was watching Tom narrowly during the few seconds in which this took place, and then said to himself, "Now, you've gone and done it. You ought to have waited a bit, you two, there'll be a row now."

There were indeed signs of a coming storm. The lad's face flushed, and his eyes gleamed with anger at these two. For one moment it was just possible the storm would have burst. But then, with an effort, he turned to his wife, whose hand was pressed on his arm as though to quiet him, and said, "My dear, you see how our friends fly to welcome us. This gentleman, in the time that has gone by, professed a great friendship for me, and borrowed my money which he forgot to repay, and would have sold me his horses had I been simple enough to buy."

"Forget and forgive old feller," Mr. Bogey interrupted. "I acknowledge I re—re—ah—repudiated the obligation, not being aware, don't you see, of the true merits of the case. But I've consulted my brother, the baronet, you know, and he's of opinion I should continue to owe you the thirty pound, and 'pon my soul I will."

"There my dear," Tom said bitterly, when Mr. Bogey had finished, "he says he'll continue to owe

me the thirty pounds I lent him, and I've every reason to believe he will keep his word. Noble, isn't he? And yet this fine-hearted gentleman, when misfortune overtook us, cut me and repudiated the loan."

"You're too hard on a feller, old feller!" murmured Mr. Bogey.

But Tom continued without noticing the interruption. "And this lady, my dear, who professes such love and affection for me, at the time Mr. Bogey dropped my society, could find nothing too bad to say, nothing too bad to think of me, whom she had in other ways sinned against. To-morrow, my dear, she will go to church and acknowledge with Saint Paul, that there are three things necessary to salvation: faith, hope, and charity, and that the greatest of these is charity. And now, dear, because fortune happens to smile on us once more, they will forgive us *their* trespasses against us, and receive us back into their friendship and love. Their conduct, I allow, is magnanimous, for it is hard to forgive those whom you have slandered, and persecuted, and sinned against. But I think that as we have done without their friendship in adversity, with a great effort, we may possibly be able to exist without it in prosperity. No Bogey! no Mrs. Revell! I——"

"Stop, Tom! stop, my boy," said Mr. Maggs, interrupting him, and waving his hand as though he would put the matter at rest in a few words. "Stop, Tom, and don't say them words, for I know you'd be wery sorry for 'em arterwards. These 'ere parties have erred, I make no doubt. But to err is human,

to forgive divine. And I must say this 'ere young man looks wery human, and, if I may make so bold, wery beery. And this 'ere old lady, she looks wery human too. Wery well, then! you forgive 'em. Life is too short to nurse ill-will. What did the Master say? 'Love ye one another, even as I have loved you.' That's what He said. Wery well, then! what follows? arn't we brothers all? if not, why not? if so, how? Am I right, or am I not right?"

"You are right, Samwel!" Mrs. Maggs informed him. "Though it's certain'y wery hard."

"Wery hard, mother! of course it's hard. Where's the credit of doing good and following the Master, if there's no cross?" inquired Mr. Maggs. And then, with a hitch at his trousers, for one of his braces had given way, and a comprehensive sweep of his hand, he summed up the whole duty of man in these words: "Wery well, then! brothers all it is."

THE END.

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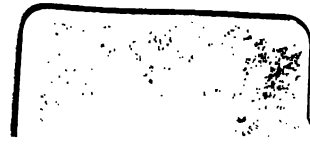
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